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ADVENTURES

OF

RALPH REYBRIDGE:

CONTAINING

SKETCHES

OF

MODERN CHARACTERS, MANNERS, AND EDUCATION.

BY

WILLIAM LINLEY, ESQ.

The ways of Heav'n are dark and intricate,
Puzzled with mazes, and perplex'd with errors,
Our understanding traces them in vain,
Lost and bewilder'd in the fruitless search,
Nor sees with how much art the windings run,
Nor where the regular confusion ends. ADDISON.

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PREFATORY ADDRESS

TO THE READER.

THE following pages were written at Madras in the year 1801, soon after the Author's arrival at that Presidency, and before he was appointed to fill any office of responsibility in the service. The Company's affairs, about this time, were in a situation extremely critical, and when the system of territorial extension so zealously adopted by the Governor-General of India had nearly swallowed up the whole of their resources. Those pecuniary supplies which were originally intended for the maintenance of their commercial credit, were to be appropriated to the payment of troops to subdue a people who increased in numbers in

proportion to the defeats they sustained, and whose invariable principle was to plunder and destroy as they retreated, leaving their conquerors possessors of a barren and depopulated country, to which it was vain to hope for the return of the scattered inhabitants, and consequently of cultivation and revenue.

How then were the expenses of such a war to be defrayed; and from whence was the constant supply of money and provision to come, for the maintenance of other troops it became necessary to pour into these newly conquered forts? It was at that time urged, and still is, by the partisans of the noble Marquis who then governed, that immediate and successful results were not to be expected from any great scheme of financial policy; that the advantages to spring from this system,

though remote, were sure, and would ultimately render the Company the most wealthy and powerful people in the world. But even admitting all this, is it not idle to speak of remote advantages, however obvious they may appear, while the existing evils and deprivations of every kind are weighing down and utterly destroying the parent stock from which these advantages are to spring?

As, in the following pages, there is nothing of a political nature particularly touched upon, either in regard to India or this country, the Author would not, in this preface, have obtruded politics on the attention of the public, but to account for such general observations regarding India as they will find in several parts of his book. From its perilous state it is now, he hopes,

happily relieved. The universal peace that reigns there, and the rigid economy preserved in every branch of the service by the present rulers, will revive the drooping hopes of the Company, and restore them to the confidence of the nation.

The establishment of the Cadet Corps is another important improvement that has taken place since the year 1801. By this excellent institution the cadets, on their first landing at Madras, find themselves under the immediate protection of government, secured from all those dangerous expenses which they before necessarily incurred, prior to the receipt of their commissions, and placed, not only in a safe and agreeable situation, but under the command of a careful and intelligent officer, appointed to instruct

them in the duties of their profession, to superintend the progress of their studies in such of the country languages to which they may prefer the application, and to report and recommend them to government according to their several merits. Thus a cadet, instead of entering upon his military career like a raw recruit who has every thing to learn, and in whom no confidence can be placed, appears at once in the character to which he originally aspired, an officer capable of command, and well acquainted with the first rudiments at least of his profession.

The publication of this work having been retarded by accidental circumstances, the Author had almost determined to suppress it altogether, but he did not feel disposed to resist the frequent partial solicitations of his friends, who were of

opinion that the little merit it possessed should meet the public eye. In that eye, he is too well aware it will materially suffer, as many, indeed nearly the whole, of those scenes, characters, and conversations, which in the year 1800 were the proper subjects of satire, have either been already handled by abler pens, or have become too stale and uninteresting for animadversion. The story, and the incidents connected therewith, have not, however, suffered any thing from their suppression, and, as the principal point to be attended to in all productions of this description is to clothe morality in the garb of innocent amusement, if in this he has not entirely failed, he will rest satisfied with his humble exertions.

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RALPH REYBRIDGE.

CHAP. I.

Which requires a reader of GREAT *patience and good-nature.*

" Plato expresses his abhorrence of some fables of the
" poets which seem to reflect on the gods as the
" authors of injustice, and lays it down as a prin-
" ciple, that whatever is permitted to befal a just
" man, whether poverty, sickness, or any of those
" things which *seem* to be evils, shall, either in life
" or death, conduce to his good."

THIS quotation from the great disciple of Socrates is very finely and aptly introduced in the Spectator, and it made so strong an impression on my mind the last time I read it over, that I conceived a text

so striking might suggest materials for a pleasing moral tale of fiction.

We have had characters and events, it is true, introduced in some very excellent novels, which have set forth the dangerous consequences of bad actions, and the certain reward resulting from good ones; in like manner, we have had interesting tales, to inculcate the practice of some particular virtue, and to render odious some particular vice: but this is not sufficient to impress upon the mind the precept of the Athenian philosopher: in order so to do, we must introduce a series of troubles and disappointments, which may *apparently* be the unjust attendants on our virtuous hero, but all of which shall be found *ultimately to have conduced to his benefit.*

When a good man arrives at some unexpected blessing, after a long life of calamity, the moralist exclaims, "Heaven has justly rewarded him for his sufferings!" But does he take any pains to

inquire, whether these very sufferings may not have been forwarding the great end of his happiness?

The moral of a tale of any description should be kept as little as possible in the back ground, and yet not too indiscriminately mingled with general and trite precepts; it should take the lead not only in the main, but adventitious, incidents of the fable, and become the beacon by which the pen of the author should be invariably guided.

Among our looser novelists of the present day, there is no rule whatever for this distribution: provided the passions are agitated, and the mind sufficiently interested by the action and machinery of the fiction, the moral, if any there be, is little thought of, or if at all, only to be conveniently tacked to the tail of the story; where it produces about as much edification to the reader, as the sage winding up of the bell-man's carol at Christmas.

Though doctors differ in ascribing

much morality to the delightful novels of Henry Fielding, yet it would be strong presumption to advance positively that they were utterly destitute thereof. The truth is, that satire is the worst of all vehicles for conveying serious impressions to the heart: the reader is rarely prepared to advert to passages and characters which have excited his laughter, for their *moral* tendency; and though in the episodes in Tom Jones and Joseph Andrews there is evidently a moral design, yet the interruptions in them are so ludicrous, and the satire so severe, that we make our remarks rather on the wit than the solidity of the author.—But Fielding wrote from the life. He contented himself with sporting his muse along the confines of his own country, nor sent her to Italy or Germany to collect those characteristic superstitions which have furbished up so many modern romances. Yet he interested as much by a series of natural events, as the ingenious author of *Udolpho* herself, with all her

magical apparatus of mystery.——But he did more than interest; he instructed and delighted. Horace has a fine rule for the novelist—

"Ficta voluptatis causâ sint proxima veris"—

And surely no one could more rigidly adhere to it than the great author of Tom Jones.

The general observer and delineator of men and manners must always find it difficult to tie himself down in the course of his story to the illustration of any fixed precept. All our old novelists exposed vice as it was, and rather wished to shame people out of it by ridicule, than scare them from it by a train of consequent calamities. Whether the former be the better mode, it is difficult to determine; it is at any rate, the pleasantest.

In the course of the following pages, I am thoroughly sensible I shall justly incur the censure of the most candid of my

readers, and, were it possible for me to foresee with what passages they will be displeased, I would expunge them, though vanity told me they were the best in my book. I am doubtful whether my digressions will be tolerated or not; I can only say in their defence, that they were all unpremeditated, and sprung immediately from the incidents before me. I may also be blamed for reviving, on various occasions, the levity of the old school; but, as I have in no instance violated that decency which my predecessors were not over scrupulous in the observance of, I am in hopes the censure will not be very severe.

I may be thought arrogant by some for having presumed to set myself up as a satyrizer of public taste, before I have arrived at an age to give strength and consequence to my reproofs. If, nevertheless, I have directed the arrow truly, how feebly soever it may strike, I shall bear

the accusation with patience, and say with Hamlet

"Let the gall'd jade wince."

After all, it will be impossible, I fear, to keep my Pegasus within the bounds of simplicity; nor will I answer for my muse's not taking a circumbendibus even to the other side of the globe. In these fanciful and capricious times, authors must be gadding if they would please; and, though a versatile genius operating with a correct judgment may contrive a profitable and entertaining work of fancy, without absolutely calling in the assistance of horror, and the additional stimulus of impiety and indecency, yet mystery must be introduced, and, however consistent an author may determine to be, he must be strange.

Reverting, finally, to my moral—Let it be remembered that when we rashly form opinions, from our own weak notions, of

the rectitude and fitness of things, and doubt the superintendence of an omniscient Being, we cannot be guilty of greater impiety; for if we presume to infer, that evil is suffered to operate to answer *only* the purposes of evil, then do we admit it an attribute of the Creator distinct from that infinite love to his creatures which must at all times be ascribed to him! Why has his providence ordained that, in the physical world, a bee shall extract honey from the rankest weed, and the spider poison from the sweetest flower? From all evil and misfortune, therefore, good must sooner or later inevitably result. Indeed, such is the boundless benevolence of the Divinity, that he makes even our deserved punishments instrumental to our good. "It was a merciful sentence," observes the ingenious author of the World, in one of his hebdomadal lucubrations, "which the Creator passed on man for his disobedience—'By the

sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread'—for to the punishment itself he stands indebted for health, strength, and all the enjoyments of life."

CHAP. II.

A brief account of a very good Old Maid and a very queer Old Bachelor.

In a small village, contiguous to the town of Shrewsbury, lived a lady of many estimable qualities, with the misfortune, however, of having attained her forty-second year under the same name she had derived from her father and mother.

An ingenious author,* now, I believe, living, has been rather severe in his strictures on ancient virgins. Perhaps a rigid critic might affirm, that there was more wit than humanity in his production; but I am no casuist, and leave it to abler heads to decide the point: in the mean time, I shall only observe, that wit, how-

* Vide Essay on Old Maids, by Hayley.

ever poignant, ceases to be gratifying to a liberal mind, when it attacks the infirmities, rather than the vices, of mankind.

For my own part, I have a vast predilection for old maids: I have ever held sacred their cats, dogs, monkeys, and pets of every denomination; nor do I think with some nice judges in these matters, that this fondness for domestic animals must necessarily exclude the sentiments of kindness and compassion towards our fellow-creatures! I allow that peevishness is not unfrequently the companion of a long life of celibacy; some instances may occur of a rancorous and vindictive disposition resulting from it; but if we reflect a little on the imperfections of human nature, and how few of us, when gratified to the extent of our wishes, have virtue enough to be satisfied, we may justly make some allowances for a class of beings which labours under one of the severest

in the catalogue of worldly disappointments.

In regard to the lady above mentioned, I scarcely know in what part of the class to place her; for she had neither cat, dog, nor parrot in her house, and lived so secluded, that, although the effects of her active benevolence were to be contemplated in every cottage that skirted the neighbourhood where she lived, yet had she seldom heard the voice of gratitude from the thatch, or listened to the blessings repeated on her name by every child in the village.

At the age of thirty, Miss (or Mrs. as we shall hereafter call her) Reybridge lost, in her mother, her only parent and friend. Mr. Reybridge, her father, a respectable attorney, had, from his activity and integrity, two qualifications the world in general do not feel disposed to bestow on this fraternity, amassed a pretty considerable fortune, but imprudently em-

barking it on a West India speculation, the bulk was involved in the general ruin of a failure, and a small sum of money was all that could be saved from the wreck. With this he purchased an annuity for the support of his wife and child, and then died of vexation.

At the time of his demise, Miss Reybridge was twenty-five: her pretensions to personal beauty were very moderate; but a most amiable disposition, engaging manners, and a well cultivated mind, made some amends for this deficiency. She had also accomplishments, which, though few, were well adapted to her capacity and inclination. Notwithstanding the greatest attention to economy, the widow could save little from her scanty annuity; and as her life declined, she had the mortification of reflecting that a few fleeting months might deprive her beloved child of her only friend, and leave her indigent and unprotected.

Whilst the good old lady was ruminating on the bitter consequences that might ensue, the unexpected arrival of a very rich, though distant relation of her husband's, from Lisbon, inspired her with the most pleasing hopes. Mr. Carberry had been abroad about fifteen years; she knew he was still unmarried, with few, if any, claims upon him; and notwithstanding he bore the character of a gloomy, rather than a sociable man, she did not hesitate a moment in resolving to cultivate his friendship, and court his protection. A letter of welcome was accordingly dispatched to him, and an invitation to reside at Woodburn, Mrs. Reybridge's house in Essex, till he could be settled to his satisfaction in town. The epistle was couched in terms the most kind and respectful, and a short time after replied to as follows:

"TO MRS. DEBORAH REYBRIDGE.

"Madam,

"Yours of the 31st ult. received great deal of business on hand, but peradventure may come your way shortly, and will give you a call. Your husband's dead, I hear. Sorry to hear it. There is a small account between us, by which there will appear a balance in my favour of 22*l.* 16*s.* 4¾*d.*; twenty-two pounds, sixteen shillings, four pence and three farthings, which I think it regular to inform you about. You being administratrix to my cousin's will, but don't want to haggle with you about the discharge.—Compliments to Miss, and rest

"Your humble servant,

"RALPH CARBERRY."

London, October 5, 17—.

Mrs. Reyb idge was a woman of some discrimination, and although the first perusal of the above answer to her letter

had rather depressed, than raised, the hopes she had so fondly cherished, yet, on a stricter examination, she thought there was more of the self-importance of a man of business about it, than the insensibility of a griping miser, and was, on the whole, better pleased with the style of it, than she would have been had it contained the most flattering professions of friendship.

A fortnight subsequent to its receipt, the writer made his appearance at Woodburn, and was received by both the mother and daughter with as much cordiality as it was possible to express towards a sallow, meagre little man, whose black, bushy eye-brows had been contracted by habitual frowning; and whose whole deportment denoted a mind infected by peevishness and irritability. After the first salutations, he fixed his eyes steadily upon Miss Reybridge: "What," said he, "this is your daughter, hey?"—Yes, Sir," replied the old lady mildly, "this is

my Emily—you can have no recellection of her, I think, she was but a little romping girl when you left England."—"Aye, aye," continued Mr. Carberry, "a pretty kettle of fish your wise-acre husband made of it, with his speculations and stuff. And now, Dame, you must look devilish sharp to prevent this poor girl from becoming a beggar!"

Shocked as Mrs. Reybridge was by the indelicacy and apparent inhumanity of this, and many succeeding speeches, she had resolution enough to check every indignant sentiment; and, during the few days of the old cynic's stay, was unremitting in the attentions she thought due to a relation of a lamented husband, though she no longer presumed to indulge a hope that he would take an interest in her daughter's future welfare. On the night, however, preceding his departure, an accident happened, which was the means of fulfilling her most sanguine expectations. "But this daughter of

yours, Dame," exclaimed Mr. Carberry, as he finished his last dish of tea, "what do you intend to do with her?" "I was thinking, Sir," replied Mrs. Reybridge, "of placing her with a very respectable woman, a milliner, at Bristol. My Emily is industrious, and I have little doubt of her giving satisfaction." "Well," resumed the old man, "the wages of industry are more creditable than those we see bestowed on"—but here he was suddenly seized with a violent pain and giddiness in his head, a complaint to which he had been subject for the last five years of his life. On this occasion the attention of Miss Reybridge was eager and interesting; and when, in consequence of the remedies she administered for his relief, he began slowly to recover, her anxiety appeared to him so lively, so natural, and so touching, that in spite of his acidity, and the cynical distrust with which, from having been often deceived himself, he had long regarded the actions of others,

he could not help being moved. After his disorder had, in a great degree, abated, he surveyed his young nurse with a more scrutinizing attention than he had hitherto done, as if anxious to sift to the very bottom of her heart. The remembrance of her father, at that instant, shot across her mind, and the tear that stole softly down her cheek, gave additional interest to the benevolence and sincerity that beamed therefrom. The old gentleman withdrew his eyes, and, fixing them on the ground, remained in a state of apparent irresolution. Mrs. Reybridge remarked his perplexity, and drew from it a favourable construction. The opportunity was not to be lost. "I was speaking to you, Sir," said she, "of the employment I had marked out for my daughter; it would, however, be doubly satisfactory to me if your approbation—" Mr. Carberry here interrupted her with a "pish" that went to the old lady's heart. She remained silent; and the subject was soon

after resumed by him. "I don't like milliners," cried he, suddenly. "Then," turning shortly to Miss Reybridge, "you are not strong enough for much work, child, hey?" There was something bordering upon a smile on the old man's countenance as he looked at Miss Reybridge, but it was scarcely discernible. "Resolution and perseverance," replied she, "will, I hope, Sir, supply the place of strength. Habit will render every new exertion less painful than the last; and the consciousness of fulfilling an act of duty will always be sweet and consoling to me." "You would then," replied Carberry, "disdain, I suppose, to be considered and relieved as an object of charity, whilst you retained all this fine resolution and perseverance, hey?"

Mrs. Reybridge sat in trembling suspense: her Emily had been taught to distinguish between a proper and a blameable pride, but it was difficult, on the present occasion, to exert one without

incurring the imputation of possessing the other: how much then was her heart relieved by the following reply. "Charity, my dear Sir, admits of various significations: if you mean, that I should disdain to live upon the precarious produce of accidental charity, I confess I should so; but I should think myself guilty of an unpardonable weakness, were I rashly to reject an establishment that might place me not only in a state of comfort and independence myself, but in a condition to render those comfortable and independent about me." "Humph!" muttered Carberry; "well, we must see what can be done. Mrs. Reybridge," continued he, rising and taking a candle, "I shall be up and gone to-morrow before you breakfast, and I must not be put out of my way; therefore do not say a word to detain me. As to Emily, who, to do her justice, seems to be a good natured girl enough, I must consider about her; I have borrowed a good deal of her time and conversation

since I have been here, and it is regular that a balance should be struck between us; but mind, I am a man of business, and must suffer no interruption, so let the writing apparatus be put in my room. Good night, good night." Thus saying, he retired, leaving the ladies in a state of anxiety easier to be conceived than described. In the morning, although Mrs. Reybridge rose earlier than usual, her guest had breakfasted, and was gone. To have balked his humour, she prudently concluded, would have been useless and dangerous; yet she felt that the old man deserved more attention at her hands than would ever be in her power to bestow. Upon Miss Reybridge's appearance, a servant presented this amiable young woman with a small packet. Gracious Heaven! what were the emotions of her heart when its contents became known! A letter was the first paper that caught her attention: she opened it, and read as follows:

"TO MISS REYBRIDGE.

"My good girl,

"Tell your mother that her late husband's debt to me must lie over, till she chooses to treat me with less hospitality. I herewith inclose the amount total of what is due to you for value received, as per sundry obligations, viz.

	£. s. d.
By a modest and dutiful carriage and behaviour - - - - - -	3,000 0 0
By diffidence, mingled with good sense, in conversation - - - -	2,000 0 0
By sundry consoling and affectionate attentions, during a short, but severe fit of illness - - -	5,000 0 0
Total	£.10,000 0 0

"Yours truly

"(Errors excepted)

"RALPH CARBERRY.

"P.S. Charity is an amiable virtue; indulge it. Don't send me any letters about gratitude, I have no time to read them."

The papers inclosed in this extraordinary epistle were bank bills and DRAFTS, to the above amount.

A writer of eminence, Dean Swift I think, somewhere remarks, that there cannot be a stronger proof of the contempt with which Providence regards vast riches, than his generally bestowing them upon knaves and fools.

The above is an exception, certainly, to the general rule. There is, however, one truth without an exception, and this is, the instability and uncertainty of all human happiness; and that amidst the vicissitudes we are hourly taught to apprehend, wealth can no more be a security for the enjoyment of a virtuous, than a vicious life. In the instance before us, fortune had, with most equitable precision, distributed her favours. She had made industry rich, to give competence to virtue; but what had been given in exchange? A grateful and affectionate friendship, liable to all its attendant

anxieties and regrets. Scarcely had Mrs. and Miss Reybridge renewed an acquaintance with their benefactor, and experienced from him fresh instances of his bounty, when he suddenly fell a victim to that climate in which he had been toiling for their prosperity.

This blow, so sudden and unexpected, was soon to be succeeded by another still more severe to Miss Reybridge, the death of her mother! Her natural good constitution, however, aided by those lessons of piety and resignation which had, from her infancy, been impressed on her mind, checked, in time, the ravages of grief; but her manners and conversation were no longer vivacious; a mild tranquillity succeeded to the triumph of her patience, and though still the tender and benevolent friend, she was no longer the sprightly companion. Desirous of emulating her deceased friend, and being left without a relation in whom she could implicitly confide, she converted her fortune into a

handsome annuity, and retired soon after she had attended her mother to the grave, to the village we have before mentioned.

Miss Reybridge was, at this time, only thirty years of age; and it will appear strange that a woman still so young, with many mental acquirements, and a good fortune at her disposal, should not have placed herself under the protection of some respectable family in the metropolis, by whom she might have been introduced to society, and secured to herself a good matrimonial establishment; but it must be observed, that Mrs. Reybridge, whose notions of propriety were uniformly rigid, had never encouraged in her daughter the slightest idea of marriage: not that the protection of a worthy man could have been rejected, but she was not to learn that the greatest accomplishments, supported by the sweetest disposition and the purest principles, rarely proved attractive without either beauty, connexion, or fortune; and the good lady was careful,

on this account, not to inspire hopes in her amiable daughter, which she saw not the most distant prospect of being able to gratify. Accustomed, therefore, to the sober recreations only of a country life, having never been exposed to the temptations of dissipation, our good spinster felt no inclination, though now possessed of the means, to emerge from her obscurity. With the inexperience of thirty, she was, however, ignorant of the misery of a restless and repining curiosity; and equally unconscious of that aggravating misfortune of being a very plain old maid. In the paths of uninterrupted peace, and at her little villa near Stoke, she continued to pursue her mortal journey; and if she looked forward to one day in preference to another, it was to that which particularly employed her in supplications and thanksgivings to her Maker.

CHAP III.

Containing much conjectural matter.

The manner in which Mrs. Reybridge lived has already been described, and for twevle years that life had been nearly the same. Among the very few of the neighbourhood with whom she had, during this period, contracted any solid friendship, was a gentleman of the name of Mapleton; he possessed a small estate contiguous to Stoke Hill, Mrs. Reybridge's residence; and though his manners and understanding would have been alone a sufficient recommendation to him, it was the severity of his misfortunes that had first endeared him to our benevolent spinster; and to soothe which she had industriously cultivated his acquaintance, and gained his confidence.

Mr. Mapleton had been a husband and a father; but as his happiness had centred in, so was it now buried with, his wife and children. The world had long been a blank to him, and society could no longer charm him. Mrs. Reybridge, who imagined no human being could have experienced greater affliction from domestic calamities than herself, was surprized at the deep, and apparently irremediable, grief of her friend. *She* had felt all the acute anguish of filial affection, yet time had assuaged *her* sorrow, and she looked forward to many years of tranquillity on this side the grave; but the good lady was, unacquainted with that tender union of interests, which is inseparable from conjugal love. The hand of death had never withered in the bud two lovely children, thriving under her instruction. She had been allured by the flattering distinctions of the world, and felt what it was to be deprived, by misfortune, of its enjoyments. Such had been the trials of Mr. Mapleton!

Awake to every advance of real sympathy, and not insensible to consolation when worthily bestowed; the unhappy gentleman did not reject, but rather courted, the soothing conversation of Mrs. Reybridge; and during the seven years which he remained her neighbour, their friendship suffered no abatement. The good man then followed his beloved family to the grave, at the age of forty-five, and about a fortnight previously to the opening of this our eventful history.

If a scandalous story has gained credit in a village of which an old maid happens to be inhabitant, a stranger, with no real bad intention, and without being conscious of injustice, will immediately set her down in his own mind as the fabricator. On the other hand, should chance have made the object of scandal the old maid herself, she is sure, on account of her celibacy, to be the longer and more rancorously persecuted! That our reason should ever assent to prejudices so pre-

posterous, only evinces the prevalence of bad example, and that we hold the customs of society in higher estimation, than moral obligations.

Hitherto this foul fiend, scandal, had vainly endeavoured to pollute the pure atmosphere of Stoke Hill. Mr. Mapleton and Mrs. Reybridge had, it is true, commenced their acquaintance in the meridian of life, but the openness of their friendship, the long attested purity of her conduct and morals, not to mention his well-known losses and sufferings, in consequence, would have proved a bulwark against the keenest and most skilfully directed shafts of malevolence, had not a *phenomenon* made its appearance, which even candour itself could not tell how to account for.

Before I proceed further in my explanation, it will be necessary that my worthy readers, as well as the worthy neighbourhood of Stoke, should have a fair field wherein to regard the phenomenon

in question. I must, therefore, premise to them, that our good spinster's house was situated at the extremity of the village, through which it was necessary to pass in order to get to it. Here, as we observed before, she resided in a very recluse manner, never visiting, and seldom receiving visits from her neighbours. Not that Mrs. Reybridge would have adopted so unsociable a rule of conduct, could talent, virtue, or distinction, have been found among them; but as these trifling recommendations were not, unfortunately, attached to their numberless other qualifications, and as the good lady was ignorant of the modern refinements on happiness, a kind of amiable neutrality was preserved by both parties. One person alone was excepted, of whom more will be said hereafter. The servants of her establishment were, an elderly man who acted in the double capacity of coachman and butler, an elderly woman who officiated in like manner as cook and

housemaid, and her house keeper who had been brought up by old Mrs. Reybridge, and was about the same age with her present mistress. We shall conclude these preliminary remarks by observing, that the only carriage which had ever been seen to issue from her gates was her own; and that this conveyed her, when the weather permitted, to contemplate the rich prospects of the surrounding country, and inhale the pure breeze of the evening.

It was nearly three weeks after the death of Mr. Mapleton, and for the first time since that calamitous event, that old Andrew the coachman was permitted to renew his evening excursions with his mistress, and to trot his horses through the village with his wonted prudence and steadiness: but not with their wonted indifference was his equipage regarded by the neighbourhood; for, besides Mrs. Reybridge, who, with more than her usual condescension and benevolence, kept smiling and bowing to every villager that passed

the carriage, there was a beautiful blooming little boy, apparently about four or five years old, and who, resolving not to be outdone by his companion in these amiable courtesies, continued to dart his little head out of the window, and to laugh, and clasp his hands till the coach was no longer to be seen.

An apparition so very strange, so altogether unaccountable, demanded an immediate investigation; and a meeting of the village gossips was summoned on the following day to discuss the important point, at the house of Mrs. Trammel, a widow lady, of great celebrity, and who had particularly distinguished herself in the neighbourhood where she now resided, by having formerly flourished in the circles of high-life, and for being duly qualified, on that account, to superintend the little etiquettes of society.

The august assembly sat accordingly; but as time had not been allowed for an *impartial* inquiry into the matter, little

passed further than a few tosses of the head, and significant whispers. In a day or two, however, the worthy president had been enabled to make one or two very notable discoveries, which she lost no time in laying before the assembly; she had paid, she said, a consolatory visit to the poor dear woman, on account of the *untimely* death of her friend; yes, and had seen the *little one.* It was a charming little boy, but, what was very extraordinary, bore a strong resemblance to a certain gentleman that was dead and gone, poor soul! notwithstanding he had a certain lady's curve of the nose! but she should name no names, not she. In consequence of this candid representation, it was, in less than a week, very confidently reported, not only at Stoke, but even all over the famous town of Shrewsbury, that the Reybridge *lapse* was one of the most extraordinary instances of frailty that ever was known.

Our good dame heard, as it was meant

she should, these reports; but they produced no worse effect than making her appear the oftener abroad, in evidently better health and spirits, and always attended by the little stranger, whose caresses she never returned with greater interest, than when she happened to be publicly seen with him. Such an open defiance of all shame was no longer to be tolerated by the decorous Mrs. Trammel and her friends; and it was therefore, in full council, resolved, that the following letter should be sent to her.

"TO MRS. REYBRIDGE.

"Madam,

"I am requested by the ladies of the neighbourhood, to acquaint you that they are concerned the rules of etiquette compel them, under *existing circumstances*, to discontinue their further visits at Stoke Hill. "I am, Madam,

"Your most obedient servant,

"E. TRAMMEL."

Stoke, Tuesday morning.

To this intimation, our worthy spinster returned the following reply.

"TO MRS. TRAMMEL.

"Madam,

"I beg you will present my compliments to the ladies of the neighbourhood, and inform them that I am very much obliged to them.

"I am, Madam,

"Your's,

"E. REYBRIDGE."

CHAP. IV.

Dramatis Personæ.

Mrs. Trammel was a widow of thirty-five, having just disposed of her second husband—that is to say, suffered him to die, as, however, he had never lived, poor man, in peace. This lady, during the early part of her life, had been an inhabitant of London, and had frequently been jostled at the routs of the great, in almost every square of that delightful city. Indeed, with such cautious tenderness had she breathed at the assemblies of fashion the whisper of detraction, that, if she sometimes a little astonished, she always entertained her hearers; and so much had nature, assisted by good example, fortified her with assurance, that she would make no scruple of uttering a calumny in one

family and contradicting it in another, though she was sure of meeting both parties the same evening at a card-table.

As a foil to the above inestimable gem, I shall now proceed to speak of the Rev. Mr. Denham, the rector of the parish. This gentleman had received from his father an excellent education, and was not only an accomplished and truly virtuous man, but a good scholar. These advantages were not, however, alone sufficient to secure his success in the world; and having been left almost destitute by the sudden demise of his venerable parent, and having no other recommendation to patronage, save his learning and his virtues, it is possible he might, at this moment, have been lingering out his days in want and obscurity, but that the Earl of Ardendale, with whom he had contracted an intimacy at the university, with a noble sense of true worth and talent, and disdaining the adulatory recommendations of

higher powers, presented his friend with the living of Stoke, which at that period became vacant. Though a small benefice, for it was barely 150 pounds per annum, it was amply sufficient for a man like Mr Denham, whose chief enjoyments were drawn from the sources of his own mental acquirements. Mrs. Reybridge, who had, from the first moment of her coming to reside at Stoke Hill, courted his society, and excepted him from the general herd, would have been happy to have improved his income; but her kind offers were at all times steadily, though gratefully, rejected. "I am become attached," would he say, "to the simple style in which I have so long lived, and no less so to the flock over which my Maker has been pleased to place me his spiritual shepherd: I will not, therefore, suffer the false glare of profusion either to endanger my principles or corrupt my taste."

It is the unpleasant, but no less neces-

sary, duty of a biographer, to be as impartial in his development of a bad as a good character. It is, therefore, with some regret, that I feel myself obliged to quit the respectable Mr. Denham, to attend to the birth, parentage, and education of a gentleman, who, if he could not boast of being a better member of society, certainly might of his having been placed therein in a more conspicuous situation. Mr. Alexander Valpine Wincroft was born a coxcomb, to the embellishments of which character he in process of time contrived to add the dexterity of a knave. As nature had given him a retentive memory and quick perceptions, he very early acquired the easy habit of becoming, among his acquaintances, a very pleasant, chatty, dashing young dog. He wrote a pretty letter, made pretty verses, could quote fluently from the poets and playbooks, and, among the misses of Cheapside and the Borough, hold an ascendancy over all other beaux. In short, Vanity

told the gentleman that he was a very pretty fellow, and he, like most other pretty fellows, paid implicit deference to the young lady's opinion. Articled to an attorney, it was some time before he could bring himself to acknowledge the necessity of drudging in an office, and frequently remonstrated with his father, a respectable and pains-taking cordwainer in Bishopsgate-street, on the injustice done to his talents, by burying them among the parchments of such a low pettifogging profession. But only one, out of many arguments which the old man used to convince him of his error, succeeded; this was the sudden demise of this prudent parent, by which he found himself deprived of all other means of subsistence. Mr. Wincroft, senior, had, indeed, very justly concluded, that, in establishing his son in a creditable profession, he had sufficiently provided for him; the residue of his fortune therefore, which was but small, was, with equal equity, distributed

between two maiden sisters, who had long been wretched dependants on his precarious bounty.

Our youth bore this thunder-clap like a hero. Anxious as he was to give a loose to pleasure and dissipation, he had sense enough to see the gulf into which such pursuits would now inevitably plunge him, and stuck manfully to his office. In a year or two he decided that it would be the wiser plan to follow the chicanery of his profession rather than the hard and precarious path of integrity and perseverance; for he calculated, that the emoluments of the former would be weighty indeed, when opposed in the scale with the tardy advantages of a regular and conscientious process. Indeed, the old adage, "What has a lawyer to do with conscience?" had, in his first outset, made a very deep impression on his mind. Mr. Valpine Wincroft, therefore, continued his career for some time under very favourable auspices; the ladies of his ac-

quaintance determined, that, for an attorney, he was both handsome and witty; whilst some of the brethren of the parchment allowed, that he was "one of the best readers in all Chancery Lane for setting the understanding at defiance." After ten years' practice, his industry, which, by the way, is a very *comprehensive* term, acquired him a decent income, and he might have continued in a flourishing state at this moment, but for a little accident, which somewhat discomposed him. He had, it seems, on one or two occasions, very unhandsomely scandalized a young lady, whom the ancients were wont to represent *blind*, with a *sword* in one hand and a *pair of scales* in the other; and this same offence having been repeated with rather aggravated circumstances, the incensed dame obliged him to make a public expiation at a certain place in London, called Charing Cross, to the very great annoyance of his ears and his nose. After such an exhibition, he thought it would

be more for his credit to resign his legal, or rather illegal experience into the hands of his clerks, which he accordingly did, after dropping the name of Wincroft, and purchasing a small estate not quite three miles from Stoke Hill; here, taking up his second name of Valpine, he soon contrived to insinuate himself into the good graces of every family in the neighbourhood, and was looked up to as one of the most *polished* men in the country.

CHAP. V.

Which shews that Mr. Valpine's genius had not deserted him with his misfortunes; and that a little wordly experience is a necessary evil even with the most virtuous of the human race.

Mr. Carberry in the postscript of that memorable letter which had put his amiable relation in possession of ten thousand pounds, recommends to her the indulgence of charity. Mrs. Reybridge, on the death of her mother, reverting to this admonition of her benefactor, concluded that she could not better employ the residue left her, which, after discharging all debts, funeral expenses, &c. &c. amounted to 8,300*l.* than by purchasing with it a handsome annuity, that might enable her, in the fullest manner, to gratify this divine

propensity. The gentleman to whom she applied to execute this business for her, strongly disapproved of the measure, and advised her to place the principal in the public funds, from which she would receive an interest sufficient to supply the comforts and conveniences of life, and the calls of benevolence too. To this proposal she replied, that as she had no claims of relationship upon her whatever, no particular friends among whom she ought justly to distribute, by will, a principal so lodged, she conceived that the poor and the friendless, in general, had the most equitable claim to the whole, and that the whole they should participate in, so long as her Maker thought proper to continue her the humble and happy instrument of his beneficence. The annuity was consequently purchased, and Stoke Hill became the spot fixed upon for the constant exercise of her benevolence and piety. It would be paying but an indifferent compliment to the penetration

of my sagacious readers to inform them, that the little stranger in Mrs. Reybridge's carriage was absolutely, and *bonâ fide*, the hero whose adventures I am about to record; and yet some doubts might have arisen on account of the name he bears in the title page; and Ralph Reybridge have been expected by a few to have started up, in the course of time, from some distant or forgotten branch of the good lady's own family. To obviate, therefore, the possibility of such an expectation being formed, I do declare on the word of an author, the little gentleman in question to be the very person to whose life, character, and behaviour, I have dedicated my pen, and no small portion of my time.

It had been expected by the Trammel convention, that Mrs. Reybridge would have sunk under the humiliating shock of such a letter as had, like one of the Pope's bulls of old, been fulminated against her; greatly, therefore, were the worthy mem-

bers mortified by the laconic answer returned. Mrs. Trammel, indeed, had seen enough of life to know that the shafts of malice, when they miss their intended victim, not unfrequently recoil on their directors; and being convinced, moreover, that the good spinster was superior to any further attack of calumny, she thought it would be as well to change her tone, and suddenly assume a great deal of candour and consideration. In consequence of this resolution of sentiment, the asperity of sarcasm was converted into restless curiosity, and her presidentship was a second time deputed by the Dames, to pay a visit at Stoke Hill. But it was now a visit of concession and reconciliation.

Mrs. Reybridge received her politely, but coldly; and her apology she treated with still greater indifference. The kind widow was, however, never tired of caressing the little boy, of whom, notwithstanding the repulse she had experi-

enced, she determined, at all events, to know something more. The good lady of Stoke Hill had, on all public occasions, introduced our hero as her little *kinsman Ralph Reybridge.* It seemed, however, obvious to the candid and more judicious part of the neighbourhood, that he was a child adopted by her either from the workhouse at Shrewsbury, or else from some poor family; and, indeed, this latter appeared to them, all circumstances considered, to be the most probable conjecture, though it will not seem so probable perhaps to the reader, when it is remembered how impartially Mrs. Reybridge had determined to distribute her charity and protection.

Ralph was the name by which her benefactor, Mr. Carberry, had been christened, and—but as I cannot afford to gratify curiosity any further at present, it may be bad policy to raise it, so I shall leave my friends to their conjectures.

Little Ralph, in the mean time, in-

creased in strength and beauty. To great vivacity he added penetration, and a solidity of understanding rarely to be found in boys of his age; in addition to these qualifications, his temper was both sweet and tractable. As he had, under the protection of old Andrew the coachman, free egress and regress to and from Stoke Hill, he very shortly made himself known to every soul in the village, and was every where welcome and at home. To Mrs. Trammel and her friends he would prattle, and tell a number of fanciful stories which he had got by rote: while under the roof of Mr. Denham he was more grave and respectful; and listened with as much delight to his cautions and instructions, as to the flatteries he received elsewhere. But among the poor he loved chiefly to wander; to be the distributor of his dear mamma's bounty, and to play with the cottage children.

Of all Mr. Valpine's accomplishments, in that very useful one of dissimulation

he might be said to excel; having been once introduced, therefore, by Mrs. Trammel (who was one of his greatest admirers) to Mrs. Reybridge, it will not be wondered at, that in the course of a little time he should so far have insinuated himself into her good graces, as to be considered a welcome visitor, in all seasons, at Stoke Hill. Philosophers have expatiated so much on the charms of solitude, that many people take it for granted it must be charming, without adverting to the old adage, "that what is one man's meat may be another man's poison:" and thus it was that Valpine, who, we will venture to pronounce, never read Zimmerman in his life, very rashly supposed that a solitary life would give *him*, as it had afforded many others, pleasure and satisfaction; but he had not reckoned on the advantages a life of seclusion gives to a certain attendant called conscience, and which companion he would very gladly have left where he had left his ears—in

the pillory. The voice of prudence is seldom regarded but by those who have suffered from the villainy of mankind; and Mrs. Reybridge, as she had never yet found it, so she had never thought it necessary to be circumspect. On Valpine's first introduction, therefore, he found little difficulty in persuading the good lady that he was a gentleman driven to distress "by a train of unavoidable misfortunes;" and, in the course of succeeding conversations, so artfully interspersed his moral and religious reflections, and affected so much humility, that he completely won her heart.

But the true character and motives of Valpine did not escape the observation of Mr. Denham. The worthy rector saw, with no inconsiderable degree of regret, into the artifices of our unfortunate gentleman, and dreaded the consequences of their success. He determined, at length, to interfere: but that he might be fully justified in the cautions he was

about to give, he commenced an inquiry into the pretensions and connections of the present possessor of Ruttle-Wood, the name of Valpine's abode. Whence did he come? and who could give any account of him? The inquiry at Stoke was attended with little success, for even Mrs. Trammel was ignorant of these particulars. At Shrewsbury, however, the good rector met with better success; for the waiters at the *gaming-house* could give a very good account of him, so far as related to many *unpaid* shares of his dinner reckonings; and, had the scrutiny been followed up, there was one John Doe, and one Richard Roe, in the town, who could have given a still better account of him.

Sufficiently confirmed in his apprehensions, Mr. Denham immediately communicated them to Mrs. Reybridge. Among the most distinguishing virtues of this good man, was the charitable construction he invariably placed on the actions of his

neighbours. If he could not justly appreciate, he had been never known to detract from supposed merit. A warning from such a man, therefore, could not fail to strike; but, though it struck, it did not alarm the good lady. Her favourite had not been accused of sinister designs; his dissipated mode of living only had been reprobated, and much might be said in extenuation of faults that did not amount to absolute depravity. Yet Mr. Denham's concluding observations sunk deep into her mind.

"In the exercise of every moral virtue," said he, "prudence ought to be the rule. It is not sufficient that we dispense, through Providence, the bounties of benevolence; we should also well consider their appropriation. When charity becomes unbounded, it is frequently abused: by prudence we are enabled to select the proper objects. The approaches of idleness and hypocrisy are thus checked, and the stream permitted to circulate

purely. I come not to accuse Mr. Valpine, but prudence, as well as justice, requires that you should know more of his character before you admit him to your confidence."

Mrs. Reybridge, though much affected by her reverend friend's caution, was still uncertain what course to pursue. At length, she replied, "Do you not, my dear Sir, admit it possible that Mr. Valpine's character may have been falsely represented to you? Detraction," added she with a sigh, "may point at one sex, as well as the *other*."—"True, madam," replied Mr. Denham, "but detraction is a depreciation of once admitted merit: before we apply this term, therefore, to Mr. Valpine, let us ascertain whether he had every any merit to admit."

Mrs. Reybridge was very much shocked by this last insinuation; and the good rector, thinking that he had said sufficient to put his friend upon her guard, took his leave.

Now it so happened, that Valpine had called at his old haunt at Shrewsbury, just after Mr. Denham had left it, and was more surprized than pleased to hear of the inquiries that had been made about him. On his return to Stoke he visited his friend Mrs. Trammel, who confirmed his worst apprehensions, by hinting to him that she knew the meddling parson had been, or was to be, with Mrs. Reybridge that day, to inform her of all his play pranks; "and," continued she, "he has such an ascendency over her, that ten to one if you ever get admitted to the pious old fool again." And now would Valpine's courage have quite deserted him, had not the devil, who was seldom from his elbow, suggested, that the only safe way to counteract this plot against him was to fight his opponent with his own weapons; and, by a voluntary confession of his follies (which confession he designed should appear as originating from the goadings of

his conscience), convince the good lady of the sincerity of his repentance. A reconciliation he knew would be the consequence, and he doubted not but he should find means, in spite of Mr. Denham, and all his rhetoric, to gain a stronger influence over her than ever.

Elated with this idea, he proceeded undauntedly to Stoke Hill, and arrived not long after Mr. Denham's departure. His scheme was successful. He found Mrs. Reybridge prepared with her inquisitorial process, but he dexterously contrived to open his confession previously, and in a manner so completely to disarm her of resentment, that her pity and forgiveness were not long withheld from him.

When Mr. Denham was informed of this circumstance, it only induced him to keep a more watchful eye over the conduct of our gentleman; of whose projects, whatever might have been a scruple or two before, he could now have no doubt. Valpine now became almost one

of the family at Stoke Hill. His attentions to Mrs. Reybridge continued to be as artfully managed as they were studied; and his apparent fondness for little Ralph completed his triumph. Our hero, however, and sorry are we to mention the circumstance, was not quite so grateful for these caresses as might have been expected, and would rather have had one encouraging pat on the head from Mr. Denham, than the most soothing blandishments and embraces from Valpine, though accompanied by as many oranges and sweetmeats.

CHAP. VI.

In which our hero shines forth in great oratorical splendour, and Valpine makes a successful attack upon Mrs. Reybridge's purse.

IT is the prevailing opinion among men of weak and bad principles, that the heart is naturally devoted to sensuality; and that it is only the effect of habit and education, when we see a preference shewn to the more dignified enjoyments of the mind. The truth is, that fools alone prefer to be sensualists; for the wise man feels, after very little experience, that the gratifications of sense are momentary, and only recollected with disgust; whereas the desire for mental recreation increases in proportion as it is enjoyed. Now, although Mr. Valpine was ignorant in

what degree of relationship master Ralph stood with his protectress, he considered that the blooming boy was the only person that could interfere between him and a good legacy: for Mrs. Reybridge had frequently related her history to him; and it occurred to him, that the only means of preventing such an unjust monopoly, was to debauch the child's mind as soon as possible; and, by gradually initiating him into vice, weaken the ties of affection by which he and his dear mamma were, at present, bound to each other. For this purpose Ralph was continually informed that this dear mamma had given him permission to go with Mr. Valpine to some ball or play at Shrewsbury; on which occasions, the worthy gentleman would endeavour to make him as sensible of the pleasures of idleness and frivolous amusements, as his tender age would admit. But it so happened that our hero's heart, contrary to Mr. Valpine's creed, was not composed of *naturally* loose materials,

and indeed Ralph only expressed his disinclination to be taken to these fine parties, because he would not be thought ungrateful for what he conceived an intended kindness.

In the mean time, whatever exertions were made use of on one side to corrupt him, there was an equal degree of zeal shewn on the part of Mr. Denham to render him invulnerable to every temptation. This good man had, from the first dawning of reason, perceived in the child the seeds of elevated thinking; a grateful disposition, and a compassionate and grateful heart: nor could he refrain from expressing a wish to Mrs. Reybridge, that he might have the pleasure of cultivating a mind so formed by nature. The worthy lady joyfully acceded to this proposition, and Ralph entered with an avidity that justified his tutor's good opinion, into a regular course of study.

Under such a preceptor, no wonder that his improvement was rapid. Val-

pine, notwithstanding, continued his attacks, and endeavoured by every art to wean him from his books, till, at length, the youth's spirits could support them no longer; and one day, when he knew that his kind friend meant to ask leave for him to go to Shrewsbury, he resolved to invent some excuse for not going. Fortune favoured his design, for Mr. Denham came unexpectedly to breakfast at Stoke Hill, and entered the breakfast parlour just as Mrs. Reybridge was preparing to make the tea. Ralph, who was sitting in deep meditation by the fire, immediately started up, and taking his tutor affectionately by the hand, "Now do, dear Sir," cried he with energy, "do give me a long exercise to do to-day, will you?" The rector was surprized at his vehemence. "A long exercise to-day, child?" replied he, "and why to-day, pray, in particular? what, have you done any thing wrong?" "I hope not, Sir," continued Ralph:—"But what's the matter, my dear," interrupted

Mrs. Reybridge. "Speak the truth, and fear nothing."—"Why, then, I *will* speak the truth," added he, "if my dear mamma will promise not to be angry; I know that Mr. Valpine means to ask leave for me to go with him to Shrewsbury to-day, and I don't know how to refuse him if I have no excuse, because he is very good-natured, and seems so fond of me." "And why should you refuse him, Sir?" retorted Mrs. Reybridge with some asperity. "Because, ma'am," replied our hero, elated with the consciousness of his argumentative powers, "because he takes me sometimes to the officers of the army, and asks me to sing to them; and they give me money, and praise me so much that they make me ashamed; for indeed I don't like to take money of any body but you and my tutor, for does it not look as if I came like a little beggar, Sir?" turning to Mr. Denham. "Then, ma'am," again directing his eyes towards his protectress, "I don't like the fine Shrews-

bury sports. One day Mr. Valpine took me to a bull-baiting, which he told me was the best fun that could be, and when the bull turned about to keep off the dogs from biting him, to be sure the gentlemen laughed very much; but with all my eyes I could not see any *fun* in the matter, and I'm sure the poor bull was of my way of thinking. But the finest sport of all was a cock-match, which was *to be fought,* I was told, by two great noblemen. I did not understand what they meant by two noblemen fighting a cock-match, but Mr. Valpine did not explain what it was. Well, and so the, cocks began to fight, and the gentlemen, as before, to laugh and shout, and bet wagers: but, I declare, when these fine cocks were taken away all bloody and dying, I could not help crying very much, which is a sure sign I shall never make a good *sportsman.* Indeed, my dear, dear mamma, I'd rather stay with you and Mr. Denham, than go to such sights,

and amongst such a noisy set of people, indeed I had. But, however, I will do any thing, and go any where, to give you pleasure."

Thus ended Ralph's speech: the longest and most eloquent he had ever yet made; and, as in places of higher authority, where one great orator has finished his harangue, two or more from the opposite quarter have arisen to reply, so, in the present instance, both Mr. Denham and Mrs. Reybridge were preparing to speak together, when the sudden entrance of Mr. Valpine himself put a period to all further debate.

"Two stars," says Shakespeare, "shine not in the same sphere." Mr. Denham therefore, instantly withdrew; or if my readers choose me to continue the figure *set*, not, however, without casting on his pupil a look of approbation, and telling him to be very careful in the performance of the *task* he had given him to do. Valpine, however, had waved his design

in regard to the Shrewsbury jaunt, in consequence of having received a message from Mrs. Reybridge the night before, purporting that she wished to consult him on some *pecuniary* matters; a conference which our good gentleman was by no means disposed to evade.

Ignorant as our spinster was on most matters of business, she yet knew that money might be better employed in a skilful agent's hands, than in the private drawer; and as, for reasons best known to herself, she had determined to put aside quarterly from her income, a sum for the future maintenance of Ralph, contrary to, her original plan of impartial distribution, it struck her, at the same time, that her good friend Mr. Valpine, who had formerly been much conversant in money transactions, would be a very proper person to manage these little supplies for him.

Valpine had always supposed that the good lady possessed a principal somewhere; for he could not comprehend

that any human creature should think of sinking ten thousand pounds, for the purpose of being better able to perform benevolent actions. His astonishment, therefore, was great indeed, when Ralph being desired to withdraw, she unfolded to him the true state of her finances, and that they went no further with her than the grave. But his hopes were again revived on being made acquainted with her design in favour of her little kinsman; and when she requested his advice in regard to the employment of the money, he observed, with becoming deference, a safer way of employing it could not be than by lodging it, from time to time, in the public funds, which office *he himself* would cheerfully undertake to perform, and receive the interest quarterly.

To this arrangement Mrs. Reybridge saw nothing to object, and expressed her acknowledgments in the warmest terms. The only difficulty that might start up to obstruct this arrangement rested with Mr.

Denham, who Valpine well knew would resist its confirmation with all his might and main: to prevent, therefore, its coming to the rector's knowledge, or, indeed, the knowledge of any other person, he artfully suggested to Mrs. Reybridge, that in conducting the education of the best disposed children, no one circumstance was more strictly to be avoided than letting them know they were, at a certain age, to be put in possession of an independence. "It not only," continued the dissembler, "checks the progress of learning, but too frequently, virtue; as it precludes the necessity of application, and consequently encourages idleness, which the wise man tells us is 'the root of all evil.' Might I advise; my little friend should be brought up under the idea that he must one day work his own way in the world, and all temptations to idleness withheld from him, till he should be capable of resisting them. I do not think that your intended bounty should, there-

fore, be known to any person, not even to Mr. Denham, who would hardly be prevented, in some moment of kindness, from acquainting him of his good fortune."

Mrs. Reybridge would have been no match for a much weaker politician than Valpine, in whose opinion she immediately and implicitly acquiesced; and it was determined, that neither the rector, nor any one else, should be made acquainted with the subject on which they had been conversing.

Such is the imperfection of human nature, that there is often a mixture of evil in our best actions; and Mrs. Reybridge, while actuated by the most benevolent sensations, was not aware that she was imprudently yielding at the same time to the blindest partiality.

In proportion as the mind of young Reybridge received cultivation from the able instructions of his tutor, the manners and conversation of Valpine became more and more disgusting to him. Fearful of

giving offence to his dear mamma, he strove to be as affable as he could in our agent's company, but it was obvious that his attentions were strained. Valpine, who attributed this repugnance in the boy to the instigations of the rector alone, could hardly disguise his rage whenever the good man's name was mentioned. To undermine his enemy in the esteem of Mrs. Reybridge, was what he wished, but almost despaired of effecting; he nevertheless occasionally hinted at the fallability of *some good people*, and that too much of the puritan *in others* was not unfrequently accompanied with a little hypocrisy. One day, in particular, in the presence of Ralph, and whilst our hero was busy over a Latin exercise, his allusions were so pointed, and his sarcasms so indecent, that the youth started up, and bursting into tears, "How, Sir," cried he, "can *you* have any just reason to suspect my dear tutor of deceit—so good a man, and a clergyman too?"—"Perhaps

the more, on that account, child," replied Valpine, with an infernal grin; "and as you are beginning to be a Latin scholar, I leave with you a line of Martial, which, with the help of your dictionary, you may translate at your leisure."

"Si possis melius fallere, sume togam."

Here Mrs. Reybridge interposed, and desired Ralph not to suffer his love for Mr. Denham, which, however, she highly approved, to get the better of his discretion. "You do wrong, my dear," continued she, "to speak so flippantly to your superiors."

The fact was, that our spinster had not seen any just cause for the disregard with which Mr. Denham always treated Valpine. His insinuations, therefore, she merely considered as the effects of a momentary spleen; whilst, on the other hand, she could not help thinking that her worthy friend, the rector, was a little too fastidious.

CHAP. VII.

Authors considered as necromancers, and an instance in point.—Further particulars of the Rector.—A very interesting conversation, followed up by a very extraordinary adventure.

The authors of plays and romances are magicians of very great power. They have time and the elements at command; and youth, age, character, sentiment, happiness, and misery, are at their controul. They can as easily make a villain as a pen, and transform him into more shapes than Proteus ever assumed. Old Shakspeare (with reverence I name the bard) takes just as much time to superintend the growth and education of his Perdita, as it takes the musicians of the orchestra to play a few bars of a sym-

phony:—and I have known one of his kings transported from England to France before he could well have got from the stage to the green-room. I have been led into this digression, the better to prepare my readers for a little necromancy of my own, by which I take the liberty of passing over eleven years of my history; and, from a boy of eight, present my hero to their attention as an elegant and accomplished youth of nineteen. During this period, little alteration had taken place in the village of Stoke, so as to affect our history. Mrs. Trammel, still in the meridian of life, according to her own account, continuing desirous of engaging once more in the matrimonial contest; and Mr. Valpine, by the assistance of the annual supplies he received from the deceived Mrs. Reybridge on account of her adopted son, carrying on a fluctuating trade at the gaming table.

Notwithstanding the excellence of our spinster's heart, and the general suavity of

her manners, she had, on all occasions, checked her young favourite in his inquiries regarding himself; and with a degree of asperity which appeared to him altogether unaccountable. He was aware that his benefactress had never been married, and was it possible he could have been the child of a licentious attachment? His reverend tutor was his only resource. He seemed confident, from the old man's silence on the subject, that he knew more of his birth than he wished to reveal, and he resolved to urge him to a discovery of all he knew.

"I confess, Sir," said he one day to him, "that the mystery of my birth, and my ignorance of my parents, are circumstances which begin to weigh heavily on my heart. Yet, whenever I attempt to open the subject to Mrs. Reybridge, she expresses so much uneasiness, that I have not for a long time ventured to pursue it."

"Alas! my dear boy," replied Mr. Denham, "I am as ignorant on this subject

as yourself; the good lady, from some motive that I am unable to divine, seems desirous of keeping this knowledge to herself; and, although I do not think she would absolutely refuse an explanation to my earnest entreaty, yet I cannot bring myself to give pain to her gentle and affectionate heart. What I do know, however, I will impart to you. "The neighbourhood saw nothing of you till you were near six years of age. I saw you when an infant in the nurse's arms; and, for the first time, in the house of a gentleman whom you may have heard your benefactress often name—Mr. Mapleton." "I see it all!" exclaimed our hero, starting from his chair. "He was, he must have been my father!—I have, indeed, heard my dear friend speak of him a thousand times!"—"I know not what to say or think on the business," returned the tutor—"I was summoned unexpectedly to Mr. Mapleton's on the 13th of November, 17— late in the evening; where I found

the good man and Mrs. Reybridge together; a circumstance which surprized me yet more than the sight of you in the arms of Mrs. Rainsford the housekeeper; as your benefactress had never been known to pay evening visits, even to the few *ladies* of her acquaintance in the neighbourhood, since her coming to reside at Stoke Hill.

"Mr. Mapleton approached, and taking my hand, 'my good friend,' said he, 'we require your assistance to make a Christian of this little cherub, whom Providence has been pleased to consign to my care; and, after my death, to that of the worthy Mrs. Reybridge. You shall one day know more about him; at present, let me intreat you to execute your holy office.' You may imagine, my dear boy, what my feelings were on this occasion. You, perhaps, know not Mr. Mapleton's story."—"I do not, Sir," replied Ralph. Mr. Denham continued. "With a beloved wife and children had long been buried his happiness and affections. He

was a man of the strictest morals, and a zealous observer, both in precept and practice, of religious duties. Yet here was strong presumptive evidence of your being his child!—That you were his by Mrs. Reybridge, I cannot, I will not believe. I did, however, as I was requested; I christened you by the name of Ralph. I even, at Mr. Mapleton's request, promised to be silent on the subject among my parishioners. Yet month after month rolled away without the further explanation that had been promised me, till the death of my poor friend dissolved the promise, on his part, altogether. As I expected, Mrs. Reybridge then took you to herself, and, for the first time, produced you to public notice. I then thought, of course, that not only myself, but the whole neighbourhood, would be informed whose child you were; but the good lady, whether from respect to Mr. Mapleton's memory, or from some dying injunctions she had received from him, was more cau-

tious than ever in each word and action that regarded you; especially to me. That she does mean, some day or another, to confide in me, I have not a doubt; in the mean time, I am equally assured that she has, in some measure, provided for you in case of her death; nor am I afraid, my dear Ralph, to encourage your expectations on this head, as I am convinced you have resolution enough, under a conscientiousness of acting right, either to enjoy your good fortune moderately, or bear the reverse with resignation." Our hero, who during this communication had been agitated to a violent degree, was now on the point of giving vent to his feelings, when his tutor, who sat fronting the window of his little parlour, from which he could see a considerable way down the high road leading to the parish church, suddenly arose from his seat, and, without speaking another word, darted out of the room. Our hero had scarcely recovered from the

astonishment this abrupt behaviour had thrown him into, when a very elegant carriage drove up, escorted by two outriders, the door of which was immediately opened by the good rector himself, and a very elegant figure of a man, in deep mourning, descending therefrom, folded him affectionately in his arms. Nothing could exceed the surprize of Ralph, at the appearance of a phenomenon so extraordinary. He well knew that his venerable master had, for upwards of thirty-nine years, been secluded from the world: that he had never contracted any new friendships, either in the village or at Shrewsbury, and that he had never mentioned any person except his old patron the Earl of Ardendale, with whom he had ever lived on terms of the least intimacy; the opening and closing of another door was a hint sufficient for our hero to remain where he was, and indeed he had frequently been left alone without half so much employment for his thoughts. A

silence of near a quarter of an hour succeeded, excepting now and then sounds, which seemed to issue from the mouth of the stranger. At length he saw the postillions remount their horses, as if by some private signal, and the carriage was out of sight in a moment.

The rector now returned to his astonished pupil, who sat in silent and anxious expectation of hearing this mystery explained; but Mr. Denham continued for a long time profoundly thoughtful, and our hero, greatly as his curiosity had been raised, yet feared a longer visit would be intrusive, and was preparing to take a reluctant leave, when the good man broke silence. "My dear Ralph," said he, "I have been at once pleased and grieved by certain revolutions that have lately taken place in the noble family of Ardendale. The Earl, my once generous friend and patron is no more, but——leave me for the present, and inform Mrs. Reybridge that I shall call

upon her to-morrow on business of importance; you will then know more of what I observe appears to you so extraordinary."

There was an evident anxiety in the countenance of the rector, which convinced our hero that any further inquiries would be unacceptable to him. He accordingly took his leave, as much at a loss to account for this singular adventure, as we sincerely hope is the reader.

CHAP. VIII.

Containing a conversation to which the reader is requested to pay particular attention.—Mr. Valpine again makes his appearance.—His old friend, the Devil, plays him a trick.

EARLY on the following morning, the rector attended his appointment, and found both Ralph and his benefactress in anxious expectation of his arrival. Having taken his seat, he began as follows:

"You will be surprized, my worthy friend, when I tell you, that, in the course of a few days, I shall quit this country, perhaps for ever." Here Mr. Reybridge testified the strongest surprize, and the third volume of an elegant edition of the Spectator fell from the hands of our hero. Mr. Denham continued. "I have lived

long enough in the world to be able to set a fair valuation on its opinion, and am therefore indifferent as to what people in general may think of a departure so strange as mine will undoubtedly appear. A few there are, however, of whose approbation I am proud, and to secure which I will not leave it in the power of malevolence to gain any triumph by misrepresentation. You, my dear madam, are one of those chosen few. You have frequently heard me speak of the Earl of Ardendale, the nobleman to whom I stand indebted for my present establishment. We had, when young men at college, been very intimate friends; our studies and recreations nearly the same. When I contemplated his character, how delightful was it to me to anticipate the lustre he seemed born to reflect on a noble house, when he should step forward as the representative; not the slave of his passions, and blinded by prosperity, but with a heart open to every impression of

goodness, and a mind highly cultivated in the school of true honour and virtue! In this view of his character, it was with pride I received from his hands the living of Stoke. 'Dear Denham,' said he, 'till it be in my power to do more for you, accept of this small testimony of my gratitude and regard. From your friendship and example I have been taught a lesson that will enable me to apply to the best purposes the gifts of fortune. That I was born to be both a rich and distinguished man, are circumstances which I as yet know not how to appreciate; but it behoves me, as a good husbandman of these important trusts of Providence, to superintend them with care, and to be ready at a moment's warning to render a good account of them.' Such were his parting words when last we separated; but how vain, how weak, are the resolutions of the best disposed men! How strong, how almost irresistible are the temptations to deviate from the right course, when plea-

sure and beauty alone direct the helm, and the rugged, but faithful pilot, Reason, is discarded from the conference! My benefactor, a short time after, married a woman his opposite in every respect. Bred up in the indulgence of every fashionable dissipation, and experienced in every insinuating art, the practice of which was aided by the most finished beauty, she found little difficulty in conquering the yielding and susceptible disposition of the young Earl; and, pursuing a constant succession of victories, triumphed at length over his principles as well as his affections, and he meanly consented to become a partaker in all the fashionable follies of a luxurious age. From that unlucky hour our correspondence ceased. Either tired of, or offended with, my remonstrances, he neglected to reply to my letters, and I soon after heard he had entirely given himself up to the Countess, and entered with blind infatuation into all her extravagant projects.

With the deepest regret I now perceived that the moral virtues had lost their hold on his heart, and I desisted from all attempts to reclaim him. Thus, a period of three-and-twenty years had nearly obliterated the name of Ardendale from my memory, when it was revived by an adventure equally affecting and extraordinary.

"Near the town of Newton, which is but ten miles from hence, and five from Shrewsbury, stands a very neat and romantic cottage, inhabited by two very worthy people, who, on account of their slender circumstances, have for many years been obliged to live in total seclusion from the world. I know, my good madam, you will think it strange that you have never heard of a family of this description so near you; but the truth is, though poor Mr. and Mrs. Rushden are far from being in a state of absolute penury, and can even enjoy the comforts of life, yet both the gentleman and the lady

have apparently received a good education, and, as they do not choose to return to a rank in life which they are unable in any way to support, they have so buried themselves from all knowledge and observation, that, excepting to a few individuals at Shrewsbury, they are not even known by name. Newton Vale has a small farm attached to it, which Mr. Rushden cultivates like another Cincinnatus, and his wife attends the dairy and the flock.

"At this very cottage, accident introduced me to the heir and only child of my noble friend, then Lord Westmore. It was on a Sunday, on my return from Newton, where I had been doing duty for the minister of that parish, Mr. Ridley. But here, madam, I must at present stop. I am not yet at liberty to reveal the misfortunes which, from that moment, bound me to him by ties still closer than those which had attached me to his father.

"At some future period, perhaps, I may be able. Ralph has, no doubt, apprized you of my mysterious visitor of yesterday. You will no longer be at a loss to guess who this visitor was, when I inform you that both the old Earl of Ardendale and his Countess are no more. The succession to the title and estates of his father would have afforded the present Earl but small consolation after a life long past in retirement and obscurity in Ireland, had not his parents' forgiveness of a fault too long and deeply resented been at length extended to him. Desirous of fulfilling every former promise made to me by the late Earl, and anxious to return some obligations which he fancies he owes me, his lordship has petitioned me, on a plea I know not how to resist, to spend the remainder of my days as the chaplain of Rothwell Castle. His only son, Lord Westmore, though hitherto he has been under the tutelage of a gentleman of exemplary piety and great learn-

ing, has still much to acquire. Bred up in almost actual retirement, he knows little of worldly matters, nor has he read many books from which he could form any general observations of men and things. Thus young and totally inexperienced, but with a disposition at the same time impetuous and fractious, the Earl trembles at the idea of sending him into the world, and it is for the purpose of completing his education, and correcting his temper and manners, that I am thus called upon; and I feel myself irresistibly compelled to obey the summons."

"I am equally surprized and grieved," replied Mrs. Reybridge, "at what you have been telling me, my dear Sir. I have many reasons, indeed many important ones, for wishing——but you are not to leave us yet?"—"There is, at present," resumed the rector, "a young clergyman in Northamptonshire, who was strongly recommended, some time since, to the late Earl, for the gentleness of his

disposition and the piety of his life. He it is who, agreeably to Lord Ardendale's desire, has cheerfully consented to an exchange with me. On his arrival, which will take place in a few days, I must prepare to depart."—"You would justly accuse me, worthy Sir," replied Mrs. Reybridge, "after your present kind communication, of an entire want of confidence, if I now any longer withheld from you that explanation which my much-lamented friend, Mr. Mapleton, once promised you."—"I am so well convinced, madam," returned the rector, "that all your actions spring from the best motives, that I am no otherwise anxious to know what you may be desirous of concealing than as it may enable me to render you service."—"I thank you, Sir," replied Mrs. Reybridge; "believe me, I do not feel conscious of having done any thing that might justly subject me to reproach. That judgment must be fallible which has not been improved by worldly expe-

rience, and in regard to which I am now going to tell you. Mr Mapleton was my first, and, indeed, only counsellor. Oh! my dear boy," continued she, turning her eyes tenderly towards Ralph, who scarcely breathed, "from what a dreadful fate—Even now I shudder at the recollection of an event which——." Here a servant abruptly entered the room, and announced the arrival of Mr. Valpine at the garden-gate. Ralph immediately arose, and took two or three turns, or rather curvets, about the room, in a transport of indignant disappointment. "Hey-day!" exclaimed the good spinster, highly displeased, "what now? What has Mr. Valpine done, that the very mention of his name should give you such great offence, Sir? If you cannot learn to respect him on his own account, at least shew him some on mine. You know not, Sir, how much this gentleman *has already been*, and will still continue to be, your friend, unless you make him your enemy,

by continuing to indulge these absurd, and indeed criminal, prejudices against him!" and here gentle reader, Mr. Denham, mild as he was, felt every inclination to stride about the room too. He had, for some years, been in a state of alarm regarding an intimacy he knew not how to account for. He had hoped that his amiable friend would soon have felt that instinctive dislike for such a man as Valpine, which good minds, when opposed to bad, in almost every instance experience: but in this he was disappointed. He was not indeed aware of the *pecuniary confidence* that had been reposed in Valpine by this worthy lady, or all surprize would soon have ceased. Her last speech again awakened his suspicions and his fears. That some villainous designs were on foot, or had already been practised upon her, seemed highly probable, but a pause of a few moments convinced him that the present was not a time either for explanation or remonstrance. He arose, there-

fore, to take his leave. "Madam," observed he, as you have kindly condescended to begin a conversation in which you may perceive how deeply I am interested, let me intreat you to appoint some time when we may be secure from interruption of any kind to end it. I, too, have something more to impart which no mistaken delicacy shall longer induce me to conceal from you."—"Well Sir," replied Mrs. Reybridge "pausing, let it be the day after to-morrow at this hour."—"If you please, madam," rejoined the rector. "Mr. Pallard, my successor will not, I think, be arrived before that time, or if he should, Lord Ardendale, who is at present remaining at Newton Vale, will have no objection to wait a day or two for me, especially as I have some little matters to settle before I take my departure." "When shall you see his lordship again?" inquired Mr. Reybridge—"I am preparing," returned the rector, "to set off immediately to Mr. Rushden's, and shall

remain with him possibly to-day and to-morrow, and be with you on Thursday morning to breakfast."

Here Mr. Valpine thought proper to make his appearance: I say, *thought proper*, because that gentleman, unwilling to interrupt a conversation so interesting, had remained at the parlour door for some time, and overheard *by accident* every word that was passing. Mr. Denham, as usual, was withdrawing with a hasty bow, when the other took the liberty, which he had never done before, to detain him. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Denham," observed he, "but, may I ask, are you acquainted with the Earl of Ardendale?" —"I am, Sir;" returned the rector, "and what then?"—"It was *his* carriage then," resumed Valpine, "that I saw yesterday afternoon driven through the avenue?" Mr. Denham, however mild to those whom he esteemed, was by no means forgetful of the dignity due to his age and profession, when attacked by the imperti-

nent curiosity of such men as his present interrogator. He therefore took no notice of this last question, but again turning to Mrs. Reybridge, wished her a good morning. Even the philosophical Mr. Valpine was nettled past endurance by a contempt so pointed. "How, Mr. Denham!" exclaimed he, "will you not deign to answer me?" "Will *you*, Mr. Valpine," replied the rector, with more than his usual energy of voice, "afterwards answer me?" "And why not?" replied the other. "Ask your *conscience*, Sir," rejoined the rector with great solemnity, and instantly left the room.

There is nothing so productive of embarrassment to a bad man, as desiring him to appeal to his conscience; for the moment he makes this appeal, which by the bye, all men so enjoined involuntarily do, this said conscience will immediately insinuate that such and such enormities must doubtless be alluded to. Mr. Denham's hint in fact went no further than to

let the gentleman know that he suspected him of fraudulent designs on the excellent Mrs. Reybridge; but his friend conscience instantly whispered in his ear; "My very worthy master, this meddling parson has certainly had a glimpse of your honour's ears *in the pillory*."

Before we proceed to open the business of Mr. Valpine's present visit at Stoke Hill, it would be necessary to take a retrospective view of that gentleman's conduct from the period of our last chapter.

Mrs. Reybridge, in conformity to the plan adopted for the future benefit of Ralph, had contrived, from year to year, to deposit in her worthy agent's hands (taking his receipts for the same, which he conscientiously insisted upon) the sum of two hundred pounds; not doubting but that the most zealous measures were constantly employed by this good friend towards the increase of the supplies in question. These sums, however, had never found their way further than the

hazard table, when they rose and fell like the stocks; but as they enabled our agent to support his credit, he disdained to look forward to future embarrassments, especially as he knew, should the worst come to the worst, "that the world was all before him where to choose."—Now it so happened, that out of two-and-twenty hundred pounds, which his deluded friend had advanced him, five hundred was alone remaining a fortnight prior to the present time. During this period, however, a constant run of good luck had so recruited his purse, that he suddenly found himself in possession not only of the two-and-twenty hundred pounds which belonged to our poor hero, but an additional stock of four hundred. With this treasure, it immediately occurred to him that he could pay off the mortgage upon his Ruttlewood estate, and he prudently set off to the house of the mortgagee for that purpose. But, unfortunately for him, the residence of this gentleman was not to be approached

but by the same way which led to the gaming table; and as he had not prepared himself by fasting or prayer, or any other penance, to resist the temptations of that old friend who had ever stuck by him, and whose name, or rather names, I forbear to mention, he found himself within hearing of the *jolly casters* before he had time to recollect himself, and was presently amidst the thickest of the fray. The tables were crowded on account of a public ball. Some young men of fashion, and flush of money, were present; it was an opportunity not to be lost, and, putting up a prayer to Fortune, he entered the lists. This fickle lady had, however, granted so many petitions already, that she had just come to a resolution to grant no more; and after suffering her miserable suppliant to turn her wheel about for a couple of hours, she left him without a guinea in his pocket. It was not till after he had brooded over this utter ruin to all his hopes for three days, that he came to the

resolution of endeavouring to extort money from Mrs. Reybridge by a feigned representation of his own immediate distresses. With this supply he had predetermined to make another desperate effort at the gaming table, and if unsuccessful to quit the country without further ceremony. This, indeed, was the object of his present visit; but the conduct and observations of Mr. Denham had by no means contributed to prepare the good lady's mind for his artful communications; nor did he feel his own powers of deception so strong upon him, since the gentle jog he had received from the monitor within, at the instigation of this good man. He therefore resolved to postpone his attack; and, after conversing with Mrs. Reybridge on one or two general topics, arose and left the room.

TANJORE MAHARAJA SERFOJI'S SARASWATI MAHAL

CHAP. IX.

More Dramatis Personæ.

MR. PHILIP RUSHDEN had received a liberal education, and was designed by his father, a respectable clergyman in Dorsetshire, for the church; but whether it was that the young gentleman could not conscientiously subscribe to the thirty-nine articles, or whether he felt that the gratification of his passions was too necessary an appendage to his happiness to be abjured, certain it is that the pulpit had no attractions for him, nor could all the eloquence of his fond father, who was really a pious man, prevail upon him to take orders, though he had the presentation of a very eligible living at his disposal. The death of the good old man made his son richer by a couple of

thousand pounds; but a philosophical friend, with whom he had been in habits of the greatest intimacy, took this favourable opportunity of requesting him to become joint security in a bond for fifteen hundred thereof, and soon after disappeared, leaving poor Philip solely responsible for the debt. Rushden bore this misfortune very unlike a philosopher; and instead of endeavouring to make the most of the five hundred that remained, carried it to a gambling society that had long been established in the regiment, where he very shortly lost the whole. The destructive dice having once been touched, were not to be quitted. Despair for his late losses drove him to deep play, the consequence of which was, that he was obliged to sell his commission to pay his debts of honour, and was reduced to the verge of poverty without a hope of being able to retrieve his circumstances.

The regiment to which he had belonged, happened, at this time, to be

quartered at Shrewsbury, and as he was not void of wit and good nature, the officers began to compassionate his situation. But though they pitied, few of them had the power to relieve; and the small subscription raised for him could not long have protracted the approach of poverty, had not an accident happened, which, if it did not in the eyes of the world redound much to his honour, certainly did to his advantage; a circumstance which his principles had placed tantamount to every other.

Lord D——, a young nobleman of great expectations, happened to join the regiment, of which he was the Lieutenant-colonel, a few days previously to its being detached on foreign service; and it also so happened, that his lordship had, a few weeks before, seduced a very pretty girl from her friends, and brought her with him as far as Shrewsbury; but here considering the impracticability, or rather the inconvenience, of keeping her longer, he found

it necessary to resolve upon some plan of getting rid of her: accordingly, when Rushden's case was represented to him, he very wisely concluded, that in desperate emergencies desperate remedies were not hastily to be rejected. Sending, therefore, for our unfortunate gentleman, he very frankly explained to him his situation in regard to Miss Rutherford, the young lady in question, and then as frankly and conscientiously proposed, that he should marry her with a dowry equal to the sum of which he had been defrauded by his false friend. To this proposal, after stipulating that no mention should ever be made of the alliance, Rushden consented: upon which, Miss Rutherford was introduced, and gently informed by the noble Colonel of the steps he had thus taken for the security of her future honour and happiness.

That a separation, however painful, was unavoidable, but that she could not doubt, after what had passed between them, of

the present creditable match he had provided for her, proving a satisfactory compensation for the loss of those attentions which he regretted he could no longer pay her. To this explanation the lady returned an ample testimony of her grief, astonishment, and indignation, by a very profuse discharge of tears, supplications, and upbraidings, in the midst of which my Lord the Colonel very prudently retreated, leaving the husband elect to administer the cup of consolation. His lordship having thus, as it is vulgarly applied, made himself scarce, and those tumults of sorrow which we have before mentioned became no longer necessary, the bride elect turned a couple of very bright eyes upon her intended spouse, which, could they have spoken, would have said—"Well, and what sort of being are you, that I am to be thus transferred to?" To say the truth, our fair frail one, fortunately for her own happiness, and her seducer's credit, was not of that tender

and sensible texture of mind which is apt to break under the weight of such treachery, and the apprehension of that disgrace and misery which so frequently attends it. She had been seduced, it is true, but it had been by vanity, a title, and promise of vast riches: which latter, if she could have secured, she would have cared little for the coronet. As love, therefore, had had very little to do with her late disappointment, and perhaps honour still less, Rushden, who was a young man of a good figure and pleasing manners, found it no very difficult matter to reconcile her to his addresses.

In a few days after, the marriage was celebrated in the presence of Lord D—— and a confidential friend; and the bride, having received her dowry, flung her arms round her husband's neck, and returned with interest the connubial kiss he gave her, professing, at the same time, that "really as affairs had turned out, she was extremely well satisfied with the arrange-

ment that had been made, for that positively, much as she had been pleased by his lordship's attentions, she should have voted it a horrid bore to have carried his knapsack in a foreign country."

During Mr. Rushden's probation in the army, his temper and habits had rendered him a very unfit man to begin the world again at the age of thirty-two, and with the incumbrance of a wife: for, in addition to a love of idleness and dissipation, temptations which he had never been able to resist, he had a great dread of being exposed to the ridicule and contempt of former friends on account of his marriage; for, notwithstanding certain stipulations which had been agreed to by Lord D—— previously to the wedding, he was by no means confident, after what had passed, that his lordship would consider himself bound by them. He began, therefore, to perceive himself a closer prisoner in wedlock, than accorded altogether with his original expectations. He might, in-

deed, have tried the hazard table again, but he was not so void of all principle and gratitude as to subject the person to utter ruin, by whose means alone he had gained his present acquisition of fortune.

After what has already been related in regard to this union, it would be but little short of impiety to affirm that *marriages are made in heaven!*—It is nevertheless certain, that this worthy pair were so well pleased with each other during the honey moon, that the separating might have proved a more difficult matter than had originally been the joining of them.

Neither Rushden nor his wife were deficient in sense. The gentleman, however, had a great deal of pride, and the lady a great deal of poverty and ambition: to struggle, therefore, with these several propensities in a cottage, was a difficulty not easily to be removed; they were obliged, however, to own, that retirement was the least of the evils that

presented themselves, and as they mutually liked each other, they did not despair of reconciling themselves to their choice.

The cottage and adjoining farm, long known by the name of Newton Vale, was, at this time, upon sale; and though not quite so far removed from the populous town of Shrewsbury as Rushden could have wished, yet it being a delightful spot, and as he could make it as retired as he chose, this objection was soon surmounted, and the greater part of Lord D——'s money was employed to a much better purpose than he had any idea, or probably any wish, that it should, viz. in the purchase of a small, but comfortable, estate.

We have already remarked, that our worthy couple had, between them, a stock of pride and vanity, that it would have been better for them could they have exchanged it for so much live stock for their farm. Mr. Rushden considered himself as very little fit for the society of his *hob-*

nail neighbours, having received a college education, and once borne a commission in the army: still less could Mrs. Rushden, as his *lady*, bear the idea of associating with their vulgar wives. As they were consequently unable to move in their proper sphere, they thought it best to remain stationary. By degrees they became reconciled to the mode of life they had adopted, and for some little time enjoyed a tranquillity almost amounting to absolute content, when some circumstances occurred, which made a very considerable alteration in their prospects; what these circumstances were must be reserved for some future pages of this our history.

CHAP. X.

Which would have been longer than it is, but for an interruption more natural than pleasing.

Mr. Rushden's habitation was situated in a pleasant valley, not far from the road-side, leading to Shrewsbury; and from which town it was about five miles distant. We could give a very luxuriant description of the surrounding hills, woods, &c. &c. &c. the rich foliage of the trees, delicious springs, and umbrageous recesses of this romantic spot—but as these important particulars are to be met with in every modern novel extant, we beg the reader would refer to one of his favourite retreats, whither we shall have no possible objection to follow him; but, after all, his own imagination will

generally suggest, on these occasions, the most natural and pleasing spots; and it is greatly to be regretted that so much good ink has been wasted, not to mention midnight oil and waxen taper, in depriving him of this privilege.

Mr. Denham, on quitting Stoke Hill, after his last conference with Mrs. Reybridge, immediately set off for the habitation in question: where, to his great surprize he was introduced, not only to Mr. Pollard, whose arrival he had not expected for several days, but to Lord Westmore, the pupil that was to supply the place of young Reybridge in his future affections and cares.

"Forgive me, my old friend," cried the Earl, after the first ceremonies were over, "for not having apprized you of this meeting; but I was not aware that Mr. Pollard would have been here so soon, or that my son would have accompanied him. A melancholy occurrence has taken place in Northamptonshire since my de-

parture, which rendered his absence from Rothwell Castle, if not absolutely necessary, at least a point of delicacy."—"There is not the smallest necessity my Lord," replied Mr. Denham, "for any apology. Prepared as I was to meet Mr. Pollard and Lord Westmore, their sudden appearance has rather pleased than surprized me."—"Alas! Mr. Denham," continued Lord Ardendale, "my venerable uncle, Lord Leybrook, has sunk under the affliction occasioned by my mother's death—he followed her last week to the grave, and has left behind him a grand-daughter who is the heiress of his large possessions, the only child of Colonel Leybrook his second son, and his beloved sister's favourite nephew. I believe I before told you that the old Baron had nominated me to be the guardian of his beloved child, and had also expressed a wish that the houses of Leybrook and Ardendale might be united: but this shall be the subject of future discussion. Miss Leybrook, I understand,

on the death of the good Baron, removed to Rothwell Castle—my son, of course, with a delicacy that became him, resolved immediately to accompany Mr. Pollard into Shropshire."—"You mean, then, my Lord, to return immediately, I presume?" replied Mr. Denham. "It is my intention so to do;" continued the Earl, "the more especially as my lovely ward is at present without a proper female companion. Our good friends, the Rushdens, are to accompany us. I am confident I can rely on the tenderness and attention of Mrs. Rushden towards the sweet girl. She has kindly promised to instruct, and you will not, I hope, be displeased to hear that my good farmer here has condescended to become my steward."—"This is indeed," cried the rector, "an unexpected arrangement. And pray, my Lord, what is to become of Newton Vale?"—"I have already settled with a man at Shrewsbury," replied the Earl, "on that head. So sweet a situation can-

not long be without a tenant or a purchaser."—"When then does your Lordship propose to depart?" replied the rector. "That, my good friend," rejoined the Earl, "will now depend upon you and Mr. Pollard. You will, doubtless, have some little matters to settle previously to your resigning the living into his hands."—"But little, my Lord," returned Mr. Denham, with a sigh. "I own I shall leave my flock with regret; but I feel an assurance that they will not long be sensible of my loss as a pastor, however they may lament my absence as a man." To this compliment Mr. Pollard made a modest bow, and a long pause succeeded.

During this conversation, Mrs. Rushden appeared to be highly delighted and interested. But there was something in the countenance of her husband which seemed to say—"there may be advantages in this change, but I would rather remain at my cottage." Lord Westmore stood at

a window, inattentive to every thing that was said. The haughty youth had returned with cold civility Mr. Denham's first address; and the sullenness of his behaviour afterwards confirmed the good man in his apprehensions, that in such a disposition, worldly knowledge might sow the seeds of selfishness and duplicity, but do little towards expanding the heart to the cause of general benevolence. But whatever might have been his feelings, he, for the present, suppressed them, and turned the conversation once more to the subject of the journey into Northamptonshire. Mr. Denham, who saw, in an equal degree with the Earl, the propriety of a speedy departure for Rothwell Castle, forlorn as the present possessor, the fair heiress of Leybrook, must have been left there, proposed to Mr. Pollard to set out for Stoke the following morning early, where he would formally consign to him the parsonage-house, and settle all other business previously necessary to a

final resignation of his sacred charge. The good rector, at the same time, naturally concluded, that a day sooner than had been appointed would make no difference to Mrs. Reybridge; that she could with equal security relate the mystery of Ralph's birth; from a knowledge of which, and her designs in his favour, he should be the better able to decide upon the future steps to be taken regarding his establishment in life.

The fact was, that the old gentleman had already fixed upon our hero as the heir of his little wealth, whatever it might be at his death; and had even entertained thoughts of speaking, should it be found necessary, to Lord Ardendale in his favour.

But in the midst of all these arrangements, and about six o'clock in the evening, a letter arrived at the cottage that threw the whole party into confusion, young Westmore excepted, who, when not spoken to by the Earl, had continued

to maintain a disdainful silence; nor could the affliction to which he saw the venerable Mr. Denham now suddenly reduced, rouse him to take the smallest concern in the business that had occasioned it.

The letter was brought by a man on a foaming horse, and presented to the good rector, who had scarcely read five lines than he lifted up his hands to heaven, and sunk back in his chair. Lord Ardendale was extremely shocked at this circumstance, and was on the point of sending for a physician, had not Mrs. Rushden assured him that it was only a little faintness, and would soon go off. This was, indeed, the case; for after the customary application of hartshorn, Mr. Denham revived and endeavoured to rise, but found himself too weak. "Good God!" exclaimed he, wildly, "what can be done? I must go to her! If I die in the attempt; I must go to her in this dreadful extremity."—"Go to whom?" in-

quired the Earl anxiously, "Can I do any thing?—speak; my carriage can be got ready in less than an hour, and I will send for it instantly."—"That will not do," continued the rector, "It will be too late, cannot I have a horse?" Lord Ardendale, who saw at once the impossibility of the old clergyman, in his present enfeebled state, attempting to mount a horse, but at the same time, concluding that something had occurred to require his immediate return to Stoke, begged permission, in a faltering voice, to read the letter; and without waiting for Mr. Denham's consent, snatched it from the ground on which it had fallen, and perused the following words:

"TO THE REV. MR. DENHAM.

"Dear Sir,

"Lose no time, on the receipt of this, in returning to Stoke. The excellent Mrs. Reybridge is at the point of death! An apoplexy. Further particulars I have

neither time nor spirits just now to relate. The last words she spoke, however, related to you and young Mr. Reybridge; and there appeared something more than common in the anxiety she expressed to see you both. Unfortunately, Mr. Ralph, a few hours only before the fatal accident happened—an accident which will, I cannot doubt, deprive us of the best and most charitable of women—had received her consent to accompany some young friends on a small party of pleasure; but I know not where to send for him, nor do any of the servants. He will, however, I hope in God, return before he loses his benefactress for ever, or his grief, poor youth, will be too great for endurance. I think it necessary to add, that the good lady was taken ill during her dinner, and that when I was sent for, I found her attended by Mr. Valpine, and, to my utter astonishment, Mrs. Trammel, with whom I had no conception Mrs. Reybridge had for many years kept up the slightest ac-

quaintance. I do not like all this: Valpine is a needy man; an adventurer; Mrs. Trammel a woman in whom no confidence can be placed: they may have their plots, especially as young Reybridge is out of the way. You will see the necessity, therefore, of an immediate attendance. I shall not quit the dying lady while any symptoms of life remain. At present she is speechless.

"Believe me, Rev. Sir,

"Yours, with respect,

"WALTER MONFORD."

Stoke Hill, Sept. 4, 17—.

Mr. Denham, who, while the Earl hastily perused this fatal letter, never had withdrawn his eyes from his lordship's countenance, now desired, in a voice tremulous indeed, but more calm, to be left alone for a few minutes, while his lordship and Mr. Rushden retired to consult on what was best to be done in this extremity. In a little time, however, Mrs. Rushden

joined them, and reported the old rector so much worse, that it would endanger his life, if he was suffered to go at all to Stoke Hill that evening. The Earl, inconceivably shocked by this intelligence, knew not how to decide. The doctor's letter was too important to be wholly disregarded; but what was to be done? It was at length determined, that Mr. Rushden should be intrusted to receive from the dying lady her last injunctions; at the same time, that he would be a check upon any impostors that might be about her in the absence of her adopted son, and Dr. Monford. This office, our recluse, who was a man not deficient in humanity, readily undertook; and Mr. Denham, feeling the utter impracticability of going himself, reluctantly consented to the arrangement. One of Lord Ardendale's horses was immediately ordered, and Rushden, in a few minutes, ready to follow the messenger who had brought the letter. "I thank you, my dear friend," cried Mr.

Denham, feebly, to him, as he was preparing to depart, "for this kind service. A stranger should not have undertaken a charge so sacred, but you I have long known, and can confide in. Oh! be mindful of the least word that escapes the dear lady regarding her young kinsman, and keep a watchful eye on the people about her; this letter has filled me with apprehensions almost too painful to bear. If you knew all!—but, go, my friend, and good angels guard you! my blessing! my blessing!" Here the good rector's emotions were too strong for utterance. A few tears, however, came to his relief, and Mr. Rushden mounting his horse was ought of sight in a moment.

CHAP. XI.

Containing many very curious particulars, amongst which is a complete revolution in the affairs of our hero; and a letter from Mr. Valpine to Mr. Denham, in which the former proves himself to be a man of humanity and integrity beyond dispute.

THE following morning had been fixed by the rector for introducing Mr. Pollard to his new office; but the old gentleman's spirits were too much agitated, and his frame yet to weak to bear even so short a journey. Lord Ardendale and his son, though they had quitted Newton Vale late the night before, for Shrewsbury, where they slept, returned there early again the next morning. Mr. Denham was still in a state of anxiety, but he had

reconciled his mind to the death of his friend, and his chief fears were now for poor Ralph.

The good rector, who for the last hour had been anxiously expecting his deputy from Stoke Hill, began to be surprized at the delay. "If any extraordinary change had taken place for the better," said he, "surely I should have received intelligence of it? If my valuable friend is no more, what can possibly detain Rushden?" Lord Ardendale was about to reply, when the gentleman himself rode furiously up to the door.

On entering the room Mrs. Rushden was the first to perceive his pale looks and agitated countenance; and though she well knew a perturbation so unusual could not have been occasioned by the death of a person he had never before seen, yet she had reasons for suppressing her curiosity on the subject, and observing that he had over heated himself in riding, proposed that he should take some re-

freshment. This advice was accompanied by a glance which was very well understood by Rushden, notwithstanding his disorder, and he instantly followed her out of the room.

Eager as the rector was to know the worst that had happened, his poor friend appeared to be so exhausted, that he did not attempt to stop him. Lord Ardendale's curiosity was not so easily restrained, and he requested Westmore to stop, and inquire whether Mrs. Reybridge was alive or dead. The young Lord, who seemed superior even to his father's command, slowly and sullenly obeyed.

But all anxiety was at once removed by the arrival of Mr. Pollard from Shrewsbury, who informed Mr. Denham that the fatal event had taken place at twelve o'clock the preceding night, and about two hours after the arrival of Mr. Rushden. He did not know the particulars of the good lady's death, but he had heard that some very interesting words had

escaped her relative to the young man that she had adopted, and which Mr. Rushden no doubt was in possession of. "And from whom, Sir," replied the rector, "have you obtained this intelligence?" "Why Sir," continued Pollard, "from an authority by no means to be depended upon, one of the waiters at the inn where I last night slept, and who had overheard a gentleman, who was *an intimate friend* of the deceased, mention the particulars of her death."—"Aye," replied the rector, with a sigh of heart-felt anguish, "that friend must have been Valpine; however, I do not despair! Rushden may have prevented villainy." Mr. Rushden at this moment entered the room. He seemed rather more composed; but still with a countenance far from being unruffled. "I have, worthy Sir," said he, addressing the rector, "a letter for you of great importance, from a Mr. Valpine; but before I give it to you, I must, in justice to this person, premise

that he has stated nothing therein regarding Mrs. Reybridge's last moments but what is true. As to the other parts of it, which speak of her anxiety, and what she had began to set aside for the young man, her adopted son, I cannot give any opinion. I neither like the man, nor his female friend Mrs. Trammel, who appeared to have a considerable influence over him; but, I confess, from the confidence which was ultimately reposed in him by the dying Mrs. Reybridge, and his conduct after her death, I am inclined to think his behaviour must, in many instances, have been candid and disinterested."—"I never can believe it," interrupted the rector; "scrupulous to a nicety as I am of imputing blame to, or insinuating suspicions of, any man, however strong the apparent evidence, I cannot doubt Valpine's character. Duplicity was never more forcibly pourtrayed in a human countenance, and his conduct has ever been correspondent thereto. Yet

it is true that I have no positive proof of his hypocrisy, or that he has been actually criminal in regard to the lady that is now no more. God alone can read the *true* state of the heart!" Rushden bowed assent to this, and then producing the letter, would have withdrawn, but the old rector requested him to stay.

"Before I begin to read this letter," continued he, "tell me, my friend, at what hour last night did you arrive at Stoke Hill; and in what state did you find the family?"—"I arrived," replied Rushden, "about ten o'clock, and inquired, as you desired me, for young Mr. Reybridge, but he was not yet returned from his excursion."—"Unhappy Ralph!" interrupted the rector; "then he did not see his benefactress to receive her last blessing?"—"He did not indeed, Sir," replied Rushden, "for I was in the room when she died, and a long time prior to that melancholy event." Here the old man heaved a deep sigh, and requested Mr.

Rushden to proceed. "I then asked," continued he, "to be shewn to the sick chamber, for that I had come, deputed by you, to receive any injunctions Mrs. Reybridge might be willing or able to commit to my charge. Dr. Monford, to whom this report was immediately carried, ordered me to be conducted up stairs, and receiving me at the door of the dying lady's room, 'I doubt, Mr. Rushden,' said he, 'you are come too late: few symptoms of life remain, and I am fearful her speech is irrecoverably gone.—I am glad, however, to see you,—go in.—I can be of no further service at present, and wish to write some letters of consequence: if any change takes place, pray order me to be called, but on no account quit the room yourself.' 'I was not surprized at this caution, after what I had heard you say regarding Mr. Valpine and Mrs. Trammel, whom I found standing near the sick bed. Mrs. Reybridge was lying without sense or motion, and, except from

an occasional convulsion, it could not easily have been ascertained whether she lived or not. For further particulars, my dear Sir, I refer you to Mr. Valpine's letter; and repeat, that whatever might have been his former conduct in regard to his deceased friend, or young Reybridge, on the present occasion it certainly reflects no discredit upon him." Rushden then left the room, and the old rector opening the epistle, read as follows:

"TO THE REV. MR. DENHAM.

"Sir,

"As I know you to have been in the particular confidence of the late Mrs. Reybridge, it appears to me just, not only to her memory, but to your pretensions and my credit, that you should be made fully acquainted with every thing that passed from the hour you left Stoke Hill for Newton, to the moment that deprived the world of this most excellent woman. I am the more anxious you should receive

this information from the hands of your friend Mr. Rushden, because you will then have no reason to doubt the truth thereof; at least that part of it which immediately relates to the good lady's death; as he was present, and can attest it. At the time I was so unfortunate as to interrupt your last interesting conversation, I had come, in conformity to a summons from the good lady, expressing a wish to consult me on some matters appertaining to the future establishment of young Reybridge; but, whether what had previously passed between you had too much affected her spirits, or from whatever other cause it was, it is now unnecessary to inquire, she thought fit, on your departure, to wave the discussion of the subject on which I had been summoned, till after dinner, to which she kindly invited me.

"Mr. Reybridge soon after accepted, with the consent of his benefactress, of an invitation to accompany some young

friends on a little excursion of pleasure on the borders of Wales. Unfortunately, no particular inquiries were made, either by Mrs. Reybridge or her servants, to whose house he was going; and, though he had mentioned the name of the person at the time, yet I little thought there would be any necessity for my paying attention to it. I was not able, therefore, to send directly to any particular place for him; but messengers were dispatched to Oswestry, and to every family at Shrewsbury with whom he is acquainted, for information. This led to a discovery of the house to which he was gone (Mrs. Plastow's, at Grimstone Lodge); but, though every possible exertion was made by the poor youth to reach Stoke Hill time enough to receive the last blessing of the best of friends, he arrived not till near an hour after her dissolution.

"It were unnecessarily painful to dwell upon the anguish he experienced on this melancholy occasion. He is now some-

what more calm; but it is impossible to remove him from the body, on which, without having taken either rest or refreshment, he continues to gaze in speechless grief. Your presence, Sir, may do something; but he will pay no attention to me, still less to the worthy Mrs. Trammel, who, I must say, has shown, on this melancholy occasion, the most active humanity. But, to return.

"I came at the hour appointed to dinner, during which she informed me, to my very great surprize, of a circumstance I should never have suspected; this was, her having sunk an original property of ten thousand pounds in the purchase of an annuity, and that, not adverting to the consideration of her income's ceasing at her death, had hitherto neglected to set aside any thing for her dear boy; an omission only to be attributed to her total ignorance and inexperience in every thing relating to her business: that she was now, however, resolved to delay this ne-

cessary duty no longer, and had, for the purpose, sent to consult me on the subject, and to beg I would take charge of *two hundred pounds*, and lodge it, for her, in the name of Ralph, in the house of Messrs. Critchill and Vines, at Shrewsbury. 'This sum,' said the good lady, 'I mean to put bye for him annually, independently of the pocket-money I at present allow him; and if you, my friend, who have been a man of business, will undertake to settle with my bankers the best mode of employing his little fortune as it accumulates, you know how much it will oblige me.' Upon my cheerfully promising to offer my best advice on this occasion, and to be at her commands for any other service she might honour me with, she arose with more alacrity than ever I observed in her before, and, opening a small escritoir, drew from thence two bank notes. These she was returning to present to me, when the fatal apoplexy seized her. Being placed in her

arm chair, I rang for the servants, and she was conveyed from thence to her chamber. Dr. Monford arriving soon after, every possible assistance was offered, though I saw, from the first glance of this skilful man's eye, that he believed all his art would prove ineffectual. I also took the liberty, as Mrs. Reybridge's own maid was herself unwell, to send privately for Mrs. Trammel, who I knew was with a neighbouring friend, and whose assistance might be necessary. It was about half past seven in the evening when the skill of the Doctor triumphed, for a short time, over the fatal disorder, and Mrs. Reybridge recovered her speech; but it was only to mention your name, and Ralph's, and to express a particular anxiety to see you both. She then sunk again into a state of insensibility. Her dissolution, however, was protracted till about an hour after the arrival of Mr. Rushden. In this interval, Mrs. Reybridge again opened her eyes, and again

spoke; but Dr. Monford was not in the chamber: your friend, Mr. Rushden, however, was. I was standing by the bed-side, when, to my surprize, she distinctly uttered my name, her dying eyes firmly rivetted upon me. I approached, and took her hand. 'My dear Ralph,' said she, 'I bequeath him to your care. Merciful Heaven protect *my child!*' Then, after a short pause, 'Oh! Mapleton! do not—do not let him know'——Here the cruel hand of death cut short a sentence which might have decided a question that must now for ever remain in doubt. I shall not presume to offer an opinion upon it, further than as it extends to the late Mr. Mapleton, whose name, from having been joined with young Reybridge's in the last words of the dying lady, must unquestionably incline the most scrupulous person to admit, that that gentleman must either have been the father, or else some near relation of this young man's. But conjecture is now

useless. It only remains to resolve upon the best means of providing for the poor youth thus unaccountably cast upon the world, without a relative he can lay any certain claim to.

"When all was over, I left the body to the care of Mrs. Trammel and the maid-servant, who was immediately summoned, and, together with Mr. Rushden, repaired to Dr. Monford's apartment, where we found him employed in writing letters it was necessary for him to dispatch early in the morning to Shrewsbury. To him we related all that had happened in his absence. He expressed the greatest astonishment; but was still convinced, that, although Mr. Mapleton might have been, and, all circumstances considered, very probably was, the father of Ralph, that it was next to an impossibility Mrs. Reybridge should, at any time, have deviated from the paths of virtue, especially at the age of forty. Indeed, in this opinion both Mr. Rushden and myself were

ready to agree. Nothing now remained but to put a seal upon the trunks, escritoir, and all other papers, &c., which Dr. Monford himself did, in the presence of the afflicted servants, and soon after departed.

"I have thus, Sir, related to you, with candour and precision, the particulars of this sad affair, and I hope you will see no reason to suspect that any one fact has been either exaggerated or suppressed. I shall conclude by calling your attention to that part of Mrs. Reybridge's last speech, in which she so expressly bequeaths young Mr. Reybridge to my care. It has ever been a matter of much regret to me, that Mr. Denham has not only thought me unworthy of his notice, but deserving of his censure. I own, Sir, that my conduct has been faulty in many respects. I contracted propensities, when very young, that I have not yet been able altogether to subdue; but I hope I am neither selfish nor ungrateful; and, be-

lieve me, I very sincerely rejoice, even amidst the depression of the present scene, that an opportunity is afforded me of proving this.

"My circumstances, Sir, are not very splendid; but I thank God they are by no means desperate, notwithstanding so many idle tongues in the neighbourhood have made them so. The two hundred pounds I received from Mrs. Reybridge are still in my possession, and, from what passed between us, may fairly be considered as belonging to Ralph. This sum it is my intention to deliver over to him, when he is in a condition to receive it; and it is further my design, if you, Sir, approve, to take him, till he is of age under my protection, according to the wishes of my departed friend; and not even then to part with him, unless it shall have been in your power, through the interest of Lord Ardendale, to procure for him some eligible situation. Even Mr. Denham must own that there can be no

selfishness in this, and that I can have no other view than wishing, as I most sincerely do, to fulfil the dying injunctions of my much-lamented friend.

"But I am willing to believe, Sir, that you may have been prejudiced against me; for the best of us cannot escape calumny, and sincerely hope that my fair dealing in the present instance will remove all unjust suspicions, and that I may be allowed, in future, to subscribe myself with very sincere respect, your faithful humble servant.

"ALEXANDER VALPINE."

Stoke Hill, Sept. 5, 17—.

It would have been difficult for suspicion itself to have discovered ambiguity or deception in the foregoing letter. Every circumstance was succinctly related, and exactly corresponded with previous informations. The circumstance of the two hundred pounds was a strong presumptive evidence of the rectitude of the writer's

intentions; for had he been a villain and in pressing want of money, what would have hindered him from secreting such a sum, and turning it to his own use? No person was by when it was given; no person knew that it was the good lady's design to advance it. Detection, therefore, appeared impossible. And it was manifest that Valpine knew all this. It was apparent that he had acted with integrity, and even tenderness, from the moment Mrs. Reybridge was taken ill. And finally, it seemed indisputable that in accepting with avidity the charge of providing for a young man who was left without a name, a relative, or the future means of subsistence, he could have been only actuated by humanity.

Such were the reflections and consequent conclusions of the rector, and indeed the whole party at Newton Vale. As they separately perused and re-perused the letter in question; but as we have some reason to believe that our segacious readers

will form a very different opinion of this said epistle, from one or two little contradictory circumstances in it, that Mr. Denham was not quite so well acquainted with, we shall proceed to explain these mysteries, to a certain extent, in the next chapter, and put an end to this without further ceremony.

CHAP. XII.

A retrospect. The rector is convinced that he has been deceived. Lord Ardendale, his son, and the Rushdens, quit Newton Vale. Mr. Denham returns to Stoke Hill, and buries his friend.

The reason of Valpine's visit, as falsely explained in his letter to Mr. Denham, has already been truly related in the conclusion of our eighth chapter. The invitation to dinner was, however, true, proceeding only from a different motive; for whereas Mr. Denham had been informed that it was to give the good lady an opportunity of consulting her worthy friend on matters relating to herself, it was in fact to hear what he had got to say on his own affairs.

Convinced by Mrs. Reybridge's manner

at the time, that the story he had prepared to deceive her with would be attended with success, he had no sooner left Stoke Hill than he dispatched a messenger to Shrewsbury, to secure a post-chaise to be in waiting for him on the London road, about half a mile from the turnpike, in which it was his intention to take refuge, should he a second time be worsted at the gaming table. This point being settled, he paid a visit to his friend Mrs. Trammel, not to deceive, but to undeceive this worthy lady, in a certain affair, which it is now high time to lay before the reader.

Mrs. Trammel had long found, in the sentiments and disposition of this illustrious character, something so conformable to her own, that, although turned of fifty, she at length formed a plan of attack upon his heart before he was prepared to defend the citadel. But great Generals, when they find themselves unexpectedly and vigorously assailed, usually make a diversion, and sometimes succeed in

turning the adversary's weapons against himself.

Thus it was with the cautious Valpine, who, though he really detested, appeared to encourage the fair widow's advances, in the hope of being able, by gaining her affections, to gain also some little ascendency over her purse, which the fluctuating state of his finances pointed out as a very desirable circumstance. Unluckily for him, Mrs. Trammel was as good a politician, and as well schooled in the arts of finesse and hypocrisy as himself: she easily discovered the "weak device of the enemy," and her offended pride immediately suggested to her the only mode of revenge that was likely to gall him most, and accelerate her own purpose at the same time. Pretending, therefore, to be caught in his snares, she seemed no longer to doubt the prevalence of her personal and mental charms; whilst he, secure as he thought of his conquest, made the first use of his advantage by softly insinuating, that, could

he get out of a cursed gambling scrape, he had now a much better opportunity of employing his time, flattered as he was by the condescending approbation of Mrs. Trammel. In short, after a few more gentle hints, the fair widow, with a sigh, promised to advance the hundred pounds he wanted; and it was accordingly done, not through her own hand, for, perhaps, such would have been the delicacy and confidence of lovers, that she might have forgotten to demand, and he to deliver, any acknowledgment, but by means of Mr. Titus Talon, the village attorney, who, if he was not as great a rogue, was at least as good a lawyer as Mr. Valpine (alias Wincroft) himself.

In this manner, at various times, he extorted from the love-sick widow 300*l.* but not being able to sigh and ogle her out of any more, he concluded that it was high time to think of a retreat. Indeed, as the worthy lady in question had been three times led to the altar before, and having,

moreover advanced to that stage of life from which Cupid flies as fast as his wings can carry him, it will not be a matter of surprize if Valpine, who in his youth had been a great lady's man, should have carried on the farce of his courtship rather awkwardly: so ridiculous, indeed, did this flirtation appear in the eyes of the neighbourhood, that it was made the subject of diversion at every tea-table.

The worthy gentleman, therefore, prepared to discontinue his visits, and his resolution was more strengthened than retarded by his last dreadful defeat at hazard. The purport of his present call was, consequently, to inform the good widow of a fatal letter which he had received from abroad, acquainting him with the unexpected recovery of *his wife*, whom he had long given over for dead, and of the cruel necessity which prudence and propriety prescribed, of a discontinuation of their former intimacy. So well had our widow played her cards, that Valpine, quick-

sighted as he was, had been deceived into a belief of the sincerity of her attachment. He therefore resolved, on the present occasion, not only to acquaint her with his misfortune in regard to his marriage, but also with his late irreparable loss at the hazard table, relying on the strength of her former professions of affection, not only for a formal release from his present debt, but for a further advance of cash. This instance of blind security may seem a little out of character; but it must be considered, that, villain as he was, he was still a coxcomb; and vanity will deceive the most skillful dissembler. He was, in short, by no means convinced that those personal attractions which had once adorned his youth were so effaced by age and debauchery, as not to have power still over the heart of such a woman as Mrs. Trammel; and, as he was not so well acquainted as our readers with certain qualifications that lady possessed, and a certain line of life she had

once pursued, he concluded from her present conduct, that she was one of those infatuated fools, who, having once professed a *platonic* attachment, would go any length to serve the object that had inspired it.

The door of Mrs. Trammel's house was opened, *accidentally*, by a gentleman he had frequently seen at Shrewsbury, but whom he was by no means prepared to meet so near his dear widow's. This was no less a personage than Mr. Snappum, an humble follower of Mr. Titus Talon, who very kindly informed Mr. Valpine, that the learned attorney was then in close conversation with the widow. This intelligence by no means prevented our lover from requesting admission to his mistress on business of the utmost importance. The lawyer was accordingly desired to witrhdaw: "But," continued Mrs. Trammel, "as Mr. Valpine's business is of importance, I think, Mr. Talon, you may as well remain in the back parlour, *in case of accidents*."

Valpine now made his appearance, with a face dressed up in the insignia of grief and disappointment; the fair widow received him with all those tender fears and apprehensions which such marks of affliction in a favoured lover might naturally be expected to excite. The usual compliments past: he began the sad story of his woes, interlarding it with many pathetic lamentations on the severity of his fate, and concluding it with a determination to abandon himself to despair, since it had torn from him the only object that could make life desirable. Having finished, he ventured to lift his downcast eyes to those of the widow, and lucky it was for him that time had robbed them of their wonted fire, or he might have experienced a worse fate than Phaeton. The good Dame sat erect in her chair, and only wanted a crown of snakes to have passed, among curious and learned men, for Tysiphone herself. Her iron visage at

length underwent a certain degree of relaxation, terminating in much such another laugh as Caliban's in Shakspeare's Tempest. "Your most obedient humble servant," cried she, "Mr. Humbug!—and so you really had the impudence to think I should be fool enough to believe all this flummery, hey? and the vanity to suppose, that I, who have had the first people of distinction in my chains, and the credit, moreover, of having buried two rich and respectable husbands, could for a moment think of disgracing myself with such an old worn out scarecrow as thou art!"—"But, my dear Mrs. Trammel!" replied the astonished lover,—"And my dear Mr. Valpine," continued the exasperated widow, "does my dear Mr. Valpine recollect that he owes me 250*l.*? and does he happen to be acquainted with one Mr. Titus Talon?" The gentleman perfectly recollected both the circumstance and the acquaintance, and was marching off without further ce-

remony, when he received a check from the good-natured Mr. Snappum, who was, indeed, one of those useful members to society, who, instead of carrying the *argumentum ad hominem* on their tongues, always bear it in their hands.

Valpine now returned to the parlour in a transport of rage, and vexation. He saw, with bitter disappointment, that he had been most egregiously foiled at his own weapons; nor could all his ingenuity suggest even a temporary means of escaping from his dilemma, for Mr. Snappum had, unfortunately, a writ against him in his pocket.

Being re-seated, he exclaimed, darting at the same time a look of reproach at the widow, "And pray, madam, what end will it answer, knowing as you now do my destitute condition, to ruin me completely? How much of your 250*l.* do you propose to recover by sending me to prison?"—"Look'ye, Mr. Valpine," replied the widow, "when two people

play at the same game, one of them must expect to be the loser. I have a better opinion of your understanding, than to suppose you want a further explanation. Now, Sir, you will please to recollect, that you have been a long time paying your addresses to me, and that I have a reputation to lose; and although this reputation will, it must be confessed, suffer considerable injury by my honouring you with my hand, yet it will not be so effectually ruined, as it would be by the gross supposition that I had received you on any other terms, and of which your present plan of desertion, if carried into execution, would be pretty strong evidence: thus situated, you will excuse me, if of two evils I choose the least, and resolve on matrimony. After all, considering the mutual contempt which I dare be sworn we have for each other, we shall agree very well together as man and wife."—"'Sdeath, madam!" sputtered Valpine, trembling with rage.—"Well,

Sir," continued the widow coolly, "as you please. Here, Mr. Talon," the worthy attorney, entered the room. "You will be obliging enough to see that our friend Mr. Valpine is escorted safely home. There is a trifling difficulty to be got over in coming to the definitive arrangement we were speaking about, for effecting which, I shall give the gentleman three hours. If we cannot then agree, the ultimatum must rest with Mr. Snappum. Good morning, gentlemen." So saying, the good lady, with a smile of triumph, waddled out of the room, leaving poor Valpine in almost as pitiable a situation as he had once before been left in the pillory.

The respite of three hours which Mrs. Trammel had mercifully given him was not, however, to be lost in idle complaints: and though he felt, in all its disagreeable novelty, the sensation of having gentlemen at his heels, whom he had had the honour to dispatch after the heels of

others, he nevertheless continued to ruminate, plot, and contrive, all the way to his own house, on the means to escape the miserable slavery of Mrs. Trammel's arms; and was determining, at all events, rather to submit to perpetual imprisonment, when his infernal majesty, too sensible of the value of Mr. Valpine's services to suffer them to be lost in a jail, instantly suggested to him, that if he could contrive, by a little coaxing and a little bribery, to get arrested while he was relating his tale of sorrow to Mrs. Roybridge at dinner, at Stoke Hill, the charitable lady would not only discharge the debt, and release him from the fangs of the widow, but still supply him with money to keep off the other misfortunes which he came particularly to relate. Delighted with the mere prospect of such a triumph, he summoned all his rhetoric to his aid, by the assistance of which, and a bribe of ten guineas, he prevailed on Snappum to suffer him to attend his en-

gagement, instructing him, at the same time, at what hour to arrest him, and not to wait till he should quit the house, but to produce his writ in the presence of Mrs. Reybridge.

This matter being settled, at the hour of three he set off for Stoke Hill, and arrived just as the unsuspicious lady was preparing to call for dinner. His confused manner and pallid countenance might have deceived a more shrewd examiner than our good spinster, and she partook of the sorrows that appeared to weigh him down. The cloth being removed, he began his story, expecting every minute the interruption of the bailiffs; but Providence, for wise purposes, had ordained one much more awful. It is not impossible but that one of those sudden revulsions of the whole system for which there is no accounting, and which is frequently attended with fatal consequences, was brought on by mental agitation in the present instance; for it was in the midst

of a fiction, well adapted to interest the various feelings of her soul, that the old lady fell back in her chair, as if she had been struck dead by the contagion of so many abominable falsehoods.

Even Valpine was shocked at this catastrophe, and something like humanity, for the first time, penetrated his marble heart. He arose, and rang the bell for assistance, with real concern. He forgot the bailiff at the door. He sent an express for young Reybridge and the doctor; and helped to convey the good lady to her chamber, without once reverting to the desperate dilemma to which this dreadful accident might reduce himself. But these disinterested feelings were soon put to flight by the sudden appearance of Mrs. Trammel in the sick room, which left him no doubt but that Mr. Snappum had betrayed him. In this conclusion the gentleman was perfectly correct. The worthy officer of the law had, it is true, received ten guineas from Mr. Valpine; but, ac-

cording to the letter, this said sum was for permitting him to dine at Mrs. Reybridge's :—no stipulation had been made to keep this arrangement a secret from Mrs. Trammel; accordingly, leaving his followers on the look-out, he repaired immediately to the widow's house, and acquainted her with the whole affair, conscientiously pocketing another guinea for his pains. Mrs. Trammel was not long in deliberating on the proper measures to be pursued. She resolved to follow the traitor instantly to Stoke Hill, where it was her intention to have revealed every thing she knew regarding Valpine and his knaveries. The widow well knew that Mrs. Reybridge, tender and benevolent as she was, would shrink with horror and indignation from a man who, under the mask of penitence, had attempted to make her the innocent cause of gratifying his vicious propensities.

After this explanation, our readers will, it is probable, more than ever be asto-

nished at the mixture of strange contradictions in Valpine's letter to Mr. Denham; the legacy of two hundred pounds; the sudden and cordial understanding between him and Mrs. Trammel; and, above all, his disinterested conduct in regard to Ralph, and his anxiety to fulfil the dying bequest of an old woman whom he had, in the very youth he was thus engaged to protect, so irreparably injured. His extreme poverty at the time, his debt to the incensed widow, in short, every other curious particular must undoubtedly puzzle them very much; but we cannot afford to be more explanatory on the business, at present, for our worthy friends are become, now-a-days, so confoundedly prescient, and prophecy generally with so much success, that we authors cannot be too cautious how we unravel the great secret of all our labours; or, in the good old homely phrase, *let the cat out of the bag.*

The oftener Mr. Denham examined

Valpine's letter, the more difficult was it for him to trace in it the slightest appearance of imposition. Yet, to leave young Reybridge under his protection went to his soul; and though he doubted not of being able in a year or two, when the Earl's family affairs were perfectly arranged, to provide for him an independent establishment; yet, into what dangers might not the unrestrained temptations of youth lead him, with such an example as Valpine continually before his eyes. That Mr. Mapleton was the father of Ralph he had now no longer any doubt, but that Mrs. Reybridge could have been his mother, appeared still as improbable as ever, notwithstanding what had been spoken by her on her death-bed. The rector had scarcely recovered from the first emotions of grief and surprize, raised by the affecting account of his friend's last moments, when he was joined by the Earl and Mr. Pollard. "Mr. Pollard," cried he, as that gentleman approached, "I am now

released from my chief anxiety, and am ready to attend you, as we proposed, to Stoke. My Lord," continued he, addressing the Earl, "the friendship that has for so long a time subsisted between the late Mrs. Reybridge and me, makes it impossible for me to leave the country before I have performed over her remains the last mournful office, and arranged any little matters regarding her servants, and the youth, her adopted child, which she may have left unsettled: let me, therefore, intreat your lordship to wave all further ceremony, and depart for Rothwell Castle. Your presence there is absolutely necessary, and you may depend upon my following you as soon as possible."—"Well," replied the Earl, after a pause, "be it so; we will set out this afternoon, but I shall insist upon leaving Robert with you; he will take care to provide those proper accommoda- tions, and prevent those impositions on the road, which otherwise you, who have

travelled so little, would be liable to.— But, tell me, my reverend friend, can I be of the least assistance to you at Stoke Hill? and what is to become of young Reybridge?"—"My dear Lord," replied the rector, "you are always kindly ready in anticipating my wishes. At present he is, I believe, provided for; but perhaps some time hence"—"I understand you," rejoined the Earl, "command my best interest and support in any line of life you may have chalked out for him; and only let me know when they are to be exerted."—"My Lord," replied the old rector, the tear trembling in his eye, "accept an old man's thanks—his gratitude:—they are all he can, at present, bestow; but true beneficence will well appreciate even so poor a return."

This arrangement being settled, it was communicated to Mr. and Mrs. Rushden, and orders given to the Earl's servants to prepare every thing at Shrewsbury for a departure in the afternoon: but Lord

Ardendale insisted upon Mr. Denham and Mr. Pollard staying and taking an early dinner with him at the inn at Shrewsbury, from whence they could return before dusk to Stoke, in a post-chaise. The old rector in consequence sat down, and wrote not only a consolotary epistle to our hero, but also one to Valpine, in which he could not avoid expressing his approbation of the fairness of his proceedings, and also his thanks to Mrs. Trammel for her kind attention to the deceased. He then wrote another epistle to his friend Dr. Monford, acquainting him with the candid behaviour of Valpine, and requesting he would give him the meeting the following day at Stoke Hill, to talk over the sad affair, and to settle finally on what was to be done in regard to poor Ralph; also to fix on a day for consigning the remains of their benevolent friend to the grave.

These letters being severally dispatched, the good man found himself more at ease. The Earl's promise regarding his beloved

pupil was a great comfort to him, and, as he knew he could rely on its being speedily and successfully fulfilled whenever he chose to claim it, he endeavoured to reconcile himself to the necessity of submitting his, now more than ever, adopted child to the care of the guardian his old friend had, in her last moments, pointed out for him; to put him upon his guard against the dangerous pleasures he might be seduced to participate in, now he was of an age the more powerfully to feel their ascendancy. In the midst of these contemplations, the Earl, who had retired whilst Mr. Denham was writing his letters, to inquire after Lord Westmore, whom he had not seen since his abrupt departure in the morning, now re-entered the room with a countenance clouded with vexation. "This strange boy, Mr. Denham," said he, "what can I do with him?"—"Bless me, my Lord, what is the matter?" replied the rector. "He was at the inn," continued the Earl,

"when my order arrived regarding our journey this evening, and Robert says very unwell from having overheated himself:—but, no sooner were my orders reported to him, than he instantly got into a post-chaise, ordered his servant to follow on horseback, and is now pursuing a rapid journey into Staffordshire by himself."—"What, my Lord!" replied the rector with amazement, "without a message or line to your Lordship?" "Not so," continued the Earl, "this note is his excuse; but it does not please me.—I do not like these sudden fits from a gloomy insensibility to every thing about him, to a determination of paying a visit to a man whom he never saw but once, and then with indifference." The rector took the note which was couched in the following terms.

"My Lord,

"I understand it to be your intention to set off for Northamptonshire this evening. As my presence at the funeral of

the late Lord Leybrook will not, I conceive, be necessary; and as I have for some time been afflicted with an unusual depression of spirits, I hope your Lordship will not be offended at the resolution I have taken to pay a visit of a few days to Colonel La Trobe, whom you did me the favour to introduce to me once at Iversfield, and who is at present at his seat in Staffordshire. The change of scene will, I hope, recruit my health; in the mean time, present my best respects to Mr. Denham,

"And believe me,

"Your Lordship's affectionate son,

"FREDERICK WESTMORE."

Shrewsbury, Friday noon.

"I own, my Lord," replied the rector, returning the letter, "the resolution is rather strange and sudden; but the depression of spirits he complains of, I think it very likely his journey may remove.—He certainly had not the appearance of being at ease here."—"Well," replied

the Earl with a sigh, "it is some consolation, at least, to observe that he has remembered, and speaks of *you* with respect. If you cannot qualify this strange turn of mind, no body can."—"You know, my Lord, what I have already said on this subject," returned Mr. Denham. The farmer with whom Lord Ardendale had agreed for the rent and future disposal of Newton Vale, being arrived to take charge, Mr. Rushden and his wife delivered over to him every thing on the premises, together with the household furniture, and prepared to take leave of their long-beloved residence. Mrs. Rushden expressed some agitation; but Rushden was several minutes before he could force himself to enter the chaise that was to carry him to Shrewsbury; he then flung himself back in the seat, and hid his face in his handkerchief with such marks of affliction, that the Earl and Mr. Denham were astonished. "Surely, my

friend," observed he to the rector as the carriages drove off, "Rushden can have no very strong reasons to be attached to this place; alas!" continued he, with a deep sigh, "What cause have not I, to sicken at the sight of it!" Nothing now materially occurred till the time of Lord Ardendale's departure, when, taking the rector aside, "I think my friend," said he, "you once informed me that the young man you are so interested about, would, on the event of Mrs. Reybridge's death, be possibly reduced to some difficulties; I desire therefore that you will, as your judgment shall see occasion, employ these notes for him till something better can be done.—Heaven bless you my dear and venerable friend! I shall expect you soon." Thus saying, he put two bank notes into Mr. Denham's hand, walked to his carriage, and was out of sight before the rector could recover from the emotions of grateful surprize, in which this his noble friend had left him.

CHAP. XIII.

Containing sundry matters of importance.—Our hero suddenly finds himself rich.—The Rector leaves him under the roof of his guardian.

I do not recollect a weakness so injurious to the individual and to society in general as false delicacy. There is a bashfulness in some people, that always stands in the way of their preferment; and many a nice person, from an apprehension of being unpolite and troublesome, has lost an excellent opportunity of securing to himself a good establishment. But this miserable infirmity is not unfrequently the cause of successful treachery,—of calumny and of disappointments, misunderstandings and vexations of every kind. In these instances, it be-

comes a species of cowardice, and deprives us of the power of preventing the commission of the greatest crimes, and sometimes asserting our just rights.

Now our worthy rector, Mr. Denham, excellent as he must appear in all other respects, was a little tainted with this infirmity, or he would not, during so many years acquaintance with Mrs. Reybridge, and esteeming her as he did, have been so very sparing of his cautions in regard to the serpent he had the least reason to suspect was daily winding himself about her. A steadier observation of his conduct would have proved to him Valpine's villainy beyond dispute; but the good man, too scrupulous of forming wrong conclusions, had kept rather aloof from the general opinion concerning him, and had not once heard that Valpine, from a state of absolute ruin, had found out some resource for the support of his dissipated habits, as sudden as unexpected. What this resource was, and how it was secured

to him beyond the possibility of detection, whilst no inquiries should be made, the reader well knows.

As Mr. Denham and his brother divine approached Stoke Hill, the former endeavoured, though not very successfully, to settle his countenance into that serenity and resignation which he knew to be necessary both for the support of his own and Ralph's resolution; but the sight of the poor of the village drawn up at the door to receive him, their cries and lamentations as the name of their deceased benefactress was repeated, quite unmanned him; and he had been half an hour in a back parlour before he was in a condition to see or speak to any body.

Mr. Valpine was then admitted, and, for the first time, courteously received by the rector. After some general inquiries, the old gentleman desired to be shown to the room where the body lay. To this movement, however, the other ventured to object. "Young Reybridge is still here

Sir," said he, "and the sight of you, though comfortable to him any where else, will, I fear, only increase his anguish."—"It is not unlikely," replied Mr. Denham. "Do me the favour, therefore, Mr. Valpine, to inform my poor boy, that I am arrived, and anxiously wish to see him here."—"Certainly, Sir," rejoined Valpine; "in the mean time will you allow Mrs. Trammel to make you some tea?"—"Mrs. Trammel!" exclaimed the rector, surprized, "is Mrs. Trammel still here?"—"She is, Sir, Mrs. Richards was taken ill before Mrs. Reybridge, and it is not to wondered at, that the death of her old mistress, which we could not conceal from her, should have increased her disorder. On this account, Mrs. Trammel very warmly insisted upon staying in the house, kindly hinting, that it was by no means proper, or even decent, that the corpse of the good lady should be commited to the care only of the menial servants."

Mr Denham was very warm in his expressions of approbation at a conduct so considerate and humane, and consented to have some tea made for him. Valpine then withdrew; and the good rector, summoning all his fortitude to his aid, and seating himself in his arm chair, prepared to receive his pupil. Our hero, grief-struck as he was, obeyed, with trembling steps, the commands of his tutor, and bursting into the room where he was, threw himself into the old man's arms, and a flood of tears, the first he had yet shed, gushed fro m his eyes. Mr. Denham did not attempt to check the friendly shower, but pressed him fondly to his breast, and waited in silence till it had ceased to flow. "Oh! my tutor, friend, father!" at length faltered Ralph, "without you to look up to, how could I have supported this dreadful affliction—this irreparable and unexpected loss? the best! the dearest! kindest!"—"Be comforted, my child;" replied the rector,

"the storm of grief will take its course, but soon passes over the head of him who calls religion to his aid. Turn, therefore, to Heaven, my dear Ralph, and remember your benefactress only as an angel of light, the inheritor of everlasting life and joy! These trials of constancy which chequer the days of man, and to which he must expect to be sometimes called by Providence, should rather be thankfully accepted, than weakly avoided—the noblest hearts have been nurtured in the vale of misfortune, as the fairest flowers have blown in the bosom of a wilderness."

The good rector, after the first emotions of grief had subsided, acquainted our hero with all those particulars respecting Mrs. Reybridge's death, which we have before related. He laid great stress on the good lady's last words, and could not avoid impressing him with an idea that Mr. Mapleton, notwithstanding the circumstances of his life, must have

been his father, though by whom, God alone could discover. "It only remains now, my dear boy," continued he, "to fulfil, in some measure, our beloved friend's last wishes respecting you. I must, in justice to Mr. Valpine, confess, that, however faulty I know him to have been in some respects, and that he is by no means a man I can set up as an example of your imitation, yet his attention to Mrs. Reybridge in her last moments, his honourable and considerate conduct respecting you, and the openness of his whole behaviour, from a period which put so effectual a stop to all interested designs upon the excellent lady, make it evident, beyond a doubt I think, that he was sincerely affected by her sudden and untimely fate. But, after all, my dear child, should any specious villainy lurk beneath this show of candour; should this unaccountable man have been instigated by the devilish passion of revenge, for we must call to mind, that we have

neither of us been accustomed to pay him the smallest attention on his own account, and taken the advantage of your benefactress's weakness, to get you in his power; you are now arrived at that time of life when reason may fairly be opposed to every pleasurable temptation, and prevent your stumbling upon error and vice. All circumstances considered, therefore, I am of opinion you should remain under Mr. Valpine's protection for a twelvemonth at least; by which time I have reason to believe the family arrangements of my noble friend, Lord Ardendale, will have been so far completed, as to enable me, without running the risk of encroaching upon his time and dearer interests, to consult him on your future establishment; on which subject he has already most generously invited me to speak whenever I may think it proper. In short, my dear boy, do not suffer your feeling heart to be depressed by gloomy anticipations. While the Almighty spares my life

you shall never be fatherless!—whilst his beneficent hand continues to pour upon *me* those abundant comforts which I have so long enjoyed, *you*, my child, shall share them with me, unexposed to the hard earnings of servility, or the more dangerous cravings of necessity." If the former part of the good man's speech caused our hero to hang his head, how was it elevated by the concluding words! —Indeed, as little justice can be done, by language, to those emotions which benevolence experiences in the greatest exertions of its power, and a grateful and feeling heart, whilst accepting a benefit, I shall draw a veil over the scene which followed, and leave it to the good-natured reader's imagination to paint it, at its leisure, which it will indubitably do much better than my pen.

On the following morning, Dr. Monford arrived at Stoke Hill, in consequence of the rector's desire. Mr. Denham met him at the door, and conducted the wor-

thy physician into a private room, where a long conversation passed between them. The Doctor, notwithstanding the new light in which Valpine at present appeared, was very averse to our hero's being consigned to his protection, even for the short period the rector had proposed. "I very much fear, my old friend," said he, "in spite of the principles with which you have fortified the youth, that this man and his wife together will be too much for them."—"His wife!" exclaimed the rector: "What! is he married?" —"Is to be, I fancy," rejoined the Doctor, "to Mrs. Trammel. You, my worthy friend, well know, that matches of this nature are mere prostitutions of that sacred ceremony which enjoins mutual love and affection, and which is too frequently debased by avarice on one side, and incontinence on the other. In the instance before us, I do not scruple to maintain, that one or both of these passions are to be gratified; not that the

widow would have fixed upon such a man as Valpine for her purposes, or that he would have sacrificed himself to the lady, could she have got a gallant, or he money, by any other means."—" Indeed, Doctor," replied Mr. Denham, " you very much shock me by this account; and yet this very circumstance of Mr. Valpine's wanting money is the strongest proof of his integrity in regard to my boy; for there is no doubt but he might have secreted the two hundred pounds given to him for Ralph's use, without the possibility of detection."—" That is an affair, I own," replied Dr. Monford, which very much amazes me. Has he produced the notes he affirms to have received from Mrs. Reybridge?"—" He offered them to Ralph last night," continued the rector, " to dispose of them as he might think proper; upon which I observed, that, till the funeral of our dear friend was over, and her papers examined, he had better retain them in his own pos-

session."—"Why, faith," rejoined the worthy Doctor, "this does, somehow, lay claim to a little confidence. I know not what to say. A year is no great matter, to be sure, and I shall take the liberty of keeping a watchful eye over my young friend now and then."—"Then, my dear Sir," replied Mr. Denham, "I shall have little fear about him." The result of a few more queries and provisos was, that Ralph should remain with Mr. Valpine till a profession had been determined upon for him.

Our hero received this intimation with grateful submission; and as both Mr. Valpine and Mrs. Trammel had been ever officiously kind to him since the death of Mrs. Reybridge, he endeavoured to get rid of his former prejudices, and to pay them that attention which their conduct seemed to deserve. "It is my duty now," said he to his tutor, "to pay some respect to Mr. Valpine; for, though I do not—I cannot love him, I am bound to

recollect that my beloved benefactress recommended me to his care." The remains of the benevolent Mrs. Reybridge were followed to the grave by our hero, Dr. Monford, Mr. Valpine, Mr. Pollard, and Mrs. Trammel, together with a vast number of the poor of the neighbouring parishes, who had long been supported by her charity. Mr. Denham, on this occasion, had collected all his firmness, but it was barely sufficient to support him through the solemn and affecting ceremony he had determined to perform. Of the pious and grateful behaviour of young Reybridge it were unnecessary to speak, or of the decent and consolatory conduct of Mr. Valpine and Mrs. Trammel: suffice it to add, that in a few days the gloom of sorrow began to evaporate, and the lighter clouds of resignation to give earnest of returning tranquillity.

At the subsequent examination of the old lady's papers, no will was to be found, nor any memorandúm whatever regarding

our hero. This disappointment was rather unexpected by the good rector, who had still flattered himself with a hope that a document would start up among her letters and other papers that might give some little insight into the mystery of his birth or connexions. Nothing, however, appeared, though the search was diligently repeated.

As Mrs. Reybridge had, however, on all public occasions, called Ralph her kinsman, as he had been adopted by her, and she had stood godmother at his christening (for Mr. Denham formally related that extraordinary event the day after the funeral), it was generally allowed that he would be the lawful heir of whatever sums of money might remain in the hands of Messrs. Critchill and Vines on her account, on the event of no prior claimants starting up, in consequence of the usual legal advertisements. These, consequently, having been made agreeably to form, and no such claimant appearing, the bank-

ers, on the strength of those declarations of the old lady's which had been so respectably attested, agreed to deliver over the balance in their hands to young Reybridge, which amounted to 350*l*. Both Mr. Denham and Dr. Monford were agreeably surprized at the magnitude of the sum; but one of the clerks informed them, that, though no person had been more regular in paying away money, the good lady sometimes forgot to draw for it.

This sum Mr. Denham advised him to let remain in the bankers' hands till some establishment should be fixed for him, as the money would then be of the utmost service to him. "In the mean time," said the rector, "whatever trifling supplies you may necessarily want, let me know, and I will take care you shall have them."

Mr. Denham and Mr. Pollard having now adjusted all matters relative to the transfer of the living, the former prepared

for his journey into Northamptonshire. Distressed as his parishioners had been at the first thoughts of losing their pastor, so long and so deservedly beloved, they became better reconciled to their misfortune when they heard his successor preach, and observed the elegance of his deportment and the simplicity of his manners. Mr. Pollard had, indeed, every requisite for the holy profession he had chosen. He was mild in his disposition, temperate in his enjoyments, of an unblemished integrity, and great benevolence of heart; and when such qualities are blended with those pure sentiments of devotion, which exalt the heart in gratitude to the Deity, they present a brighter example for the imitation of good christians, than is to be met with among the greatest luminaries in theatrical controversy.

Valpine still carried on the appearance of disinterested friendship towards our hero, and the good rector was more and

more convinced that he had nothing to apprehend, either from the artifices of the one, or the weakness of the other. "I leave with you Mr. Valpine," said Mr. Denham, on the night before his departure, "a heart free from guile, a disposition gentle and tractable, a mind well cultivated, and principles which I hope and believe are unassailable. What your own are I do not presume to inquire, but if I am to judge from the liberal conduct you have hitherto observed towards our young friend, I cannot suppose you will interfere with his, and above all, that you will rather check, than encourage, in him the slightest propensity to dissipation; which, in his present situation, without any immediate establishment, and ignorant of his future destination, might plunge him into difficulties whence it would be beyond either your power or mine to extricate him."

Mr. Valpine's reply was pertinent

enough, but as it contained a great deal of profession, and very little truth, we have not thought it necessary to insert it.

The parting of Ralph and his tutor was almost as deep an affliction to the former as the death of his benefactress had been; nor could all the consolatory endeavours of the latter, or his grave expostulations, reconcile the poor youth to a separation so insupportably painful. The tears rolled down his cheeks as he strained his earliest monitor and friend to his breast; and though the rector endeavoured to comfort him with the assurance of his constant correspondence, and that they should meet again in perhaps less time than he had mentioned, yet Ralph felt a sad conviction that the happy period was much further off—that it would perhaps never arrive.

Mr. Denham was equally affected, but the kindly drops did not so immediately

come to his relief:—One tear alone, the result of contending emotions, stole softly down his face, and it was, perhaps, the last sweet offering of declining nature.

CHAP. XIV.

Mr. Valpine and Mrs. Trammel are made one.—Their conduct towards Ralph not so easily to be accounted for.

Mr. Valpine's residence of Ruttle Wood, was situated on the side of a hill, commanding a view of the town of Shrewsbury, from which it was a distance of about five miles. As the grounds and gardens about it had been much neglected, by their present worthy possessor, it was with no small share of satisfaction that young Reybridge, who had been always particularly fond of botanical pursuits, took them under his own care and management; the rest of his time he devoted to his studies, and to music and drawing, in which delightful accomplishments, though perhaps not a proficient, he had

made considerable progress. He had also a horse, which Mrs. Reybridge gave him a short time before her death, and an apartment to himself. In short, the first six weeks after Mr. Denham's departure, during which he was left entirely to pursue his own inclinations, he had so little reason to complain of Mr. Valpine's conduct towards him, that he began to accuse himself of injustice, and to believe that both himself and the good Mr. Denham had been deceived in the worthy man's character. In this interval, notwithstanding his former reluctance, the gentleman in question, with much apparent tranquillity, conducted to the altar the timid *blushing* Mrs. Trammel. We do not mean to assert that the good widow's blushes were of that convenient description which come and go as occasion calls, but of that good substantial quality which causes them to stick firm to the face in defiance of sickness, shame, or surprize; in short, the fair lady was conscious that

she was about to deceive her lover with a divided heart, and that the coniac bottle had an equal share at least in her affections.

This valuable addition to Mr. Valpine's domestic establishment made no alteration whatever in the mode of life our hero had set down for himself; from Mrs. Valpine he met with neither interruption nor opposition; on the contrary, she seemed to vie with her worthy husband in the attentions she paid to him, and the kindness with which she treated him. Not long after this auspicious union, Mr. Valpine became so weary of the retirement of Ruttle Wood, that she prevailed upon her spouse to dispose of the estate and take a house at Shrewsbury, where they might be a little more seen, and be the better able to enjoy the greatest of all blessings, plenty of good company. As this estate had some excellent arable land about it, and under the management of a good farmer would have yielded twice the crop

that Valpine had been accustomed to raise, a purchaser was not difficult to be found, and a bargain was struck to the entire satisfaction of Mrs. Valpine. Mr. Valpine was however rather more easily reconciled to this charge, than his ward, who very soon discovered that he would now be necessarily obliged to accommodate himself sometimes to the humours of the lady, and make one in the amusements she had so long planned, and now began to put in practice. But poor Ralph calculated *only* upon the inconvenience and waste of time attending such recreations; he had no apprehension that they might gradually lead to a corruption of taste, and a laxity of principle.

To gain the affection and confidence of our hero was no very difficult task; for he was naturally good-tempered, ingenuous, and unsuspicious. Valpine was indebted both to nature and education for a smooth plausibility in his actions and conversation, and it required infinitely more penetra-

tion and worldly experience than Ralph was perhaps ever destined to acquire, to detect villainy under that specious covering his guardian could always put on. Our hero had not yet conquered his former prejudices against these people, but it was impossible for him to remain long insensible to unremitting kindness; Valpine on his part was never weary of telling him what a happiness it was to have him under his roof, whilst the wife insinuated her flattery, by observing what a charming youth he was; how elegant in his person, how engaging in his manners, and how every way calculated to win the affections of the ladies; so that poor Ralph was at last overcome, and his heart yielded to the first dangerous impresssion of vanity.

What was the surprize of the whole neighbourhood of Stoke, when the good inhabitants were informed of the sudden departure of this worthy pair from the sober mansion of Ruttle Wood, for the purpose of entering into a gay life at Shrewsbury:

not that it was unknown to them that a gay life would be the one prefered by both, the wonder was from whence proceeded the fund for supporting it?

Mrs. Valpine was a woman, it is true (or had been so), of some property, but the greater part of this she must have sunk in the first instance, to pay off a heavy mortgage on the Ruttle Wood estate, for Valpine's final ruin at the gaming table had long been the subject of general observation, and it was also as generally known that his creditors were determined to put him into prison in consequence. That Mrs. Valpine before her marriage had more than sufficient to answer all these exegencies was not to be disputed; but that having answered them, she should still retain enough not only to keep up her usual establishment, but to increase it, and even commence a career of extravagance, to which her husband seemed to have no objection, though he had obviously consented to marry the good

widow to get quit of difficulties brought on by a similar mode of life; all these circumstances, therefore, afforded matter for great marvel and inquiry; and it was supposed that the worthy couple must, by some means or other, have received some considerable legacy, unknown to every body else, from the late Mrs. Reybridge.

This conduct towards our hero was still more amazing!—Not but what certain slanderous tongues found little difficulty in ascribing pertinent reasons for the lady's endearments, preposterous as the idea was: but that Valpine, envious, mean, selfish, and revengeful, should take so much pains to ingratiate himself with a forlorn youth, who had never liked him or courted his regard, and was now, though not absolutely an object of charity, yet utterly destitute of rank or connexion in life, was a riddle that defied solution. Surprizing, however, as all these matters were, reasons might possibly have been assigned for them, had the tongues of the

good people in question been obliged to reveal what was written in their hearts. Among the various visitors that were constant attendants at the card-table of Mrs. Valpine, we must not forget to mention a few of those gentlemen who had contributed to the ruin of her husband. Shocked as Reybridge was, at first, by the licentiousness of their manners and conversation, even before ladies, yet, as there was always a seducing mixture of good humour and pleasantry in their songs, repartees, and anecdotes, and as on these occasions the rites of Bacchus were most cheerfully celebrated, Ralph would oftener join in the jest than retire from the table: sometimes he even contributed thereto; till, by degrees, he began to argue with himself whether those sober maxims of *temperance* which Mr. Denham had taken so much pains to impress upon his mind, were not a little *too rigid*. The first wound the poor youth's conscience received, was in his being reduced to the

necessity of encroaching upon the little fortune he had lodged in the hands of the bankers, and which he had faithfully promised his tutor not to touch. He had, however, contracted a debt at *cards*; and how could he draw upon his reverend friend for money to discharge *such* an obligation?

And thus does insincerity in the first instance pave the way for greater misfortunes; for had not the worthy rector been kept in ignorance of this first lapse of his adopted son, he would have rescued him instantly from the hazard of a second, and preserved him from a long succession of anxieties and distresses. But Heaven directed otherwise; how wonderfully, and how justly, will be known in due time.

Stung to the quick by this breach of promise, to a man, too, of all others he could least bear to deceive, he gave vent to his self-reproaches before Mr. and Mrs. Valpine, and begged their advice how he should act:—Valpine replied only by

bursting into a fit of laughter; but Mrs. Valpine thought proper to display her eloquence on the occasion. "My dear Ralph," said she, "when you know a little more of the world, you will not be terrified at bug-bears of this kind. The breach of a promise so ridiculous is not in my opinion half so reprehensible as the exaction of it. Indeed, I am quite astonished, that a sensible man, like Mr. Denham, should wish thus to deprive you of the means of enjoying the *innocent* recreations of life, and in which you are now of the properest age to participate."

"You don't consider, my dear boy," added Valpine, "that with your talents and address, it should be your first object to acquire the confidence and esteem of people, who, either of themselves, or by their recommendations, may be able to bring those talents forward, and make you beneficial to society.—But this confidence is only to be obtained by conforming, in some measure, to the cus-

toms and fashions of the world; and studying the dispositions of men, whom it may be to your advantage to keep well with."

On the following evening, Mrs. Valpine had a larger party at her house than usual: Ralph, naturally vivacious, no longer thought of moderating his spirits; but sung, laughed, chatted, played cards, and drank his wine with the gayest in the circle. The next morning, the long expected letter arrived from his tutor. His conscience smote him as he traced the well-known characters, and Valpine and his "midnight crew," were remembered only with disgust. After a late breakfast, he retired to his room, and opening the letter with eyes of expectation, read what is contained in the next chapter.

CHAP. XV.

Which contains Mr. Denham's letter to Ralph Reybridge.

"My dear Ralph,

"I fear you will have suffered much anxiety from my long silence; but the truth is, I have, since my arrival here, been so employed by various little occupations and domestic arrangements with my noble friend, and I may say benefactor, Lord Ardendale, that till this moment I have not had an opportunity secure from interruption. My journey hither was not so fatiguing to my spirits as I apprehended it would be; principally owing to the activity and diligence of a servant of the Earl's, who had orders to accompany me and secure for me the best accommodations on the road. I ar-

rived at Rothwell Castle, therefore, in tolerably good health, and as my situation in the family was generally known, the most respectful attention was paid to me, and my generous host received me with open arms.

"This ancient and magnificent structure is situated on the borders of the river Ouse; and commands an extensive and picturesque view of the surrounding country. It is defended by a romantic grove of trees, beyond which is a noble park, and grounds to a great extent. If I were inclined to enter upon a poetical description of Rothwell Castle, I could bring you back to the thirteenth century; so wild and Gothic does every thing appear to me, whose contemplations at my beloved village never extended further than the cottage, the upland lawn, or the corn-field. And after all, my dear boy, these simple prospects are most delightful to my eyes, most cheering to my heart. When I view the smoke ascend-

ing from the thatch of the husbandman, my thoughts are instantly directed to the pure and healthful enjoyments of innocence, industry, and content. But, when I turn my eyes to edifices such as I behold in Rothwell Castle, my mind is clouded by the sad conviction that feudal barbarity may have originally erected them for the support of pride, ambition, cruelty, slavery, and bloodshed!

"But, if the imagination of the spectator be transported to the dismal era I have mentioned, by surveying the Castle, and surrounding scenery without, it will quickly be brought back to our own times by a view of its internal decorations, which are so well adapted to put every idea of gothicism out of his head, that he would very justly suppose himself in apartments ornamented for a birth-day ball or masquerade. Lord Ardendale contemplates these innovations with some disgust; but respect and tenderness to his mother's memory will prevent him, at

least for some time, from restoring this ancient seat of his ancestors to its former dignity.

"The apartments allotted to me I find rather more capacious than comfortable; however, they contain an excellent library, a pair of globes, a telescope, and a set of mathematical instruments: those branches of the mathematics which comprehend astronomy and geometry, I studied with great perseverance in the earlier part of my life, and the renewal of them now with my new pupil, Lord Westmore, will afford me very great satisfaction. The study of astronomy is not only pleasing in itself, but contributes to amplify the mind by abstracting it from worldly considerations, and inviting it to the sublimest of all contemplations—the infinite power, wisdom, and goodness of God!

"Not far from Rothwell Castle is another ancient building, which the late owner, Lord Leybrook, has left in the possession of a most amiable young lady,

his grand-daughter: as she is not yet of age, she resides with her guardian Lord Ardendale, who treats her with all the affection which a father would pay to a beloved daughter; she is indeed a most lovely young woman, and well deserves every attention that can be shewn her.

"There is a very interesting, but mournful tale attached to the first meeting of the present Lord Ardendale and myself, which you shall one day hear: it relates to his lady, who, when she died, was only Lady Westmore. The circumstances of her death have yet been concealed from the world, but now I think they should be made known.

"The Earl's domestic establishment is preserved without any appearance of pomp or ostentation: every thing is conducted in a manner to restore that dignity to the name of Ardendale, which the follies of the late Countess, and the weakness of her Lord, had almost wholly effaced.—Yet it will require all the care and abi-

lity I am master of, to make the son resemble his noble father. Not that Lord Westmore wants acuteness, or is insensible to the distinctions of right and wrong, but there is a fickleness in his temper that makes him equally indifferent to commendation or encouragement, as impatient of reproof. Indeed I fear the preceptor's yoke will sit heavy upon this young man, but I shall endeavour to make it as easy as I can, consistently with my own character and my duty: what I most regret to find in him is, an inclination to *deceive.* This I must, in the first instance, check; or every other attempt to make him either useful or virtuous in life will be ineffectual.

"Nothing, my dear Ralph, is so dangerous as disguise, in any shape: if the slightest spark be upon the garment of truth, it will be easily discerned; never, therefore, be induced to deceive even in jest, for innocent deceptions will most assuredly, at some period of life, lead to

guilty ones. Thus the child who is told he may play about in a pleasant garden, so long as he is careful to avoid a certain pitfal in a particular spot, will, nevertheless, in some unguarded moment neglect his usual caution, and rush into the snare.

"Your letters, my dear boy, give a mixture of pleasure and uneasiness. Your last afforded me very little indeed of the former, and a great deal of the latter; and I shall not be satisfied till you are away from these Valpines: their intentions towards you may be kind, and indeed I believe they are so, but this sudden change from Ruttle Wood to Shrewsbury, is by no means pleasing to me; and the worthy Dr. Monford continues to write in alarm about you.—All these matters considered, therefore, I shall take the earliest opportunity of speaking to Lord Ardendale on the subject of a profession for you.

"The natural vivacity of your dispo-

sition, aided as it is by a retentive memory and quickness of perception, inclines me to think you would succeed at the bar; and I should make no hesitation in deciding upon this profession, were it not so expensive and precarious; besides a London life, the men you must associate with, generally giddy and dissipated, would lead you imperceptibly into dangerous confidences, and temptations would result from these beyond your power to resist.

"Should the law, however, be ultimately our choice for you, I think you will hold out against the allurements of vice, should you not enter too precipitately into the views and opinions of hundreds, who, pleased with your good nature and your talents, will be courting your acquaintance. Be civil and courteous to all; but your friendship and confidence reserve for the sensible and judicious. Keep in mind this great moral truth—that nothing is truly valuable in

the world but in proportion as it is useful; that most pleasures, unless they lead to the improvement of the mind, are incentives to idleness. Above all, remember that when you are cast upon the ocean of life, however watchful you may be to avoid the false lights that may be hourly attracting your little bark to destruction, that it is your confidence in Providence alone that will enable you to keep on your steady course.

"Mr. Rushden has commenced his occupations as the Earl's steward with credit and success; he is kind to the tenants, and punctual and accurate in his accounts: Mrs. Rushden does not, however, succeed so well in her capacity as Miss Leybrook's companion. This young lady, to very great personal attractions, unites a fine natural understanding, a highly cultivated mind, an amiable disposition, and a refinement and delicacy in her manners and conversation, which Mrs. Rushden is totally unacquainted with;

yet, so fearful is this sweet girl of giving uneasiness either to her guardian or the lady he has chosen for her companion, and being moreover of a sprightly and contented nature, that she endeavours to reconcile herself to love and even esteem her. In answer to this long letter, my dear Ralph, I expect a good account of yourself.

"Be civil and attentive to the friends you are with, but by no means make yourself the butt of their companies; rather avoid them as much as you possibly can, without giving offence. I have no objection to your making cards an amusement sometimes, if you find your inclinations tempting you no further; but the moment you feel a desire to make the winning of money the primary object, renounce them from that moment: gambling, of all other vices, is the most dangerous; of itself, it is not so odious, perhaps, in the sight of God, but it leads to those that are most so; it agitates the mind, it inflames the

passions, it destroys the reason, it breaks every bond of society, every link of friendship, every tie of love, and it leads, by dreadful gradations, from avarice, fraud, and impiety, to poverty, disgrace, and untimely death!

"But these cautions, my dear Ralph, I am sure, are needless. Let the little fortune you possess remain where it is, for the reasons I have before given; the inclosed note of 50*l.* will answer all immediate expenses, and should you find it insufficient, let me know, but touch not your capital.

"I need not remind you of the necessity of close and regular application to your reading; and do not forget to send me, occasionally, your essays in English and Latin, on didactical, poetical, and historical subjects. Your lighter pursuits, music and drawing, be likewise attentive to, for they will be of great advantage to you hereafter, in your introduction into life. Above all, be scrupulously mindful

of your religious duties: let no frivolous enjoyment seduce you from a regular performance thereof; so may you hope for the favour and protection of him who can alone give efficacy and success to your endeavours.—Adieu! my dearest child, write soon and often to your

"Affectionate friend,

"CHARLES DENHAM."

Rothwell Castle, Dec. 3, 17—.

CHAP. XVI.

In which our hero's misfortunes and Valpine's plots begin to thicken.—Mrs. Valpine appears in high glory.—Reybridge's decline, ruin, and imprisonment.

WHEN brilliant talents are joined to great good nature, the virtuous principles of a young man are not sufficiently sheltered from the incroachments of seduction by mere books. There must be a living monitor to counteract them; some friend, beloved as well as respected, and to whom the heart is attached as to a parent, brother, or dear and old acquaintance. And this is more especially necessary when there exists great sensibility; for sensibility generally requires an object of attachment, and will yield to the constant kindness of vice itself.

In this dangerous predicament, now stood our hero. He had a good natural understanding, but for want of experience he was unable to exert it effectually. He had imbibed the pernicious draught of adulation, but had no Mr. Denham to fly to, to rescue him from a repetition of it. Thus dissipation had, by degrees, become pleasant to him, and he was too *sensible* of the kindness with which the Valpines and their friends treated him, to refuse any longer to join in their most riotous parties, engage in the deepest play, take his occasional trips to London with any *dashing* young men that proposed a frolic of the kind. In short, his promise to Mr. Denham was no longer regarded. He neglected even to write to him. Heedless of the dreadful consequences, he suffered himself to be imposed upon by false friends, and his money in the bankers' hands was daily and hourly employed, not only to supply his own but their extravagancies. The letter,

however, with which we concluded our last chapter, had, in the first instance, been of service to him, for though in his answer thereto he did not, as he ought to have done, confess his breach of promise in having drawn upon Messrs. Critchill and Vines, yet on all other matters he had been sincere; and his conduct for several weeks after, such as the most rigid moralist would have approved. His studies were pursued with avidity, his recreations with temperance, and though he continued his cheerful habits, he never descended to turbulent mirth, or joined in scandalous and licentious conversations. But an accident intervened which overset every commendable resolution, and plunged him once more into folly, thoughtlessness, and extravagance.

A rheumatic fever had for a long time put a stop to the letters which his guardian angel, the rector had before regularly sent him; for the efficacy of which was such, that every irregular desire fled

at their approach from his heart, and rendered him invulnerable to seductions of every description. Deprived of these timely rectifiers, his conduct became gradually less guarded, and Mr. and Mrs. Valpine were too sensible of the importance of his return to dissipation, not to take every advantage of the change.

The worthy Dr. Monford who had, according to his promise, narrowly watched both the conduct of Ralph and that of his seducers, without either party imagining he was taking the slightest observation thereon, was, by this time, satisfied in his own mind, that some secret villainy lay concealed in every part of Mr. Valpine's friendly, disinterested, and ingenuous behaviour :—and, though it was altogether impossible for him to trace this villainy to its source, he thought it high time our hero should be rescued from its further influence, and he wrote to the old rector accordingly. The contents of this epistle were of such a nature as to grieve

and alarm the worthy man more than he had ever been before: for he had so fixed his affections upon our poor youth of mystery and misfortune, that the death or dishonour of his own child could not have more afflicted him. In the first tumult of his anxiety and apprehension, instead of answering his friend's letter, he, ill and disabled as he was by the rheumatism that had not yet left him, immediately dispatched the following lines to Ralph.

"I have only strength, forgetful and irresolute young man, to bid you fly—instantly fly from beneath the roof of these hateful Valpines—get into a post-chaise, and take the road to Warwick. There you will meet with a servant who will conduct you to Rothwell Castle. Make no delay as you value your future happiness, and my further regard and protection.

"CHARLES DENHAM."

Rothwell Castle, March 15, 17—.

This important epistle on its arrival was carried to Mrs. Valpine, Ralph not being at home, who, having cast at it two or three suspicious glances, accompanied by several unsuccessful squeezes, in order to ascertain the contents thereof, betook herself to her scissars, which she managed so dexterously, that she contrived to unfix the sealing-wax, but with a conscientious determination of replacing it after a careful perusal of the words it had so faithfully concealed. When she came, however, to that part of the good rector's epistle where the name of Valpine was so expressively distinguished, the good lady altered her resolutions; not but that she would quietly have acquiesced in the opprobrious epithet alluded to, had it been applied solely to her husband, but she could by no means endure so scandalous a reflection upon her own chaste character: accordingly, after summoning to her presence the worthy partner of her cares by a bell, the clapper of which the good man

deemed infinitely preferable to that which occupied his wife's mouth, she flung the letter at him, desired him to read it, and then to decide upon some method of revenging an affront so gross and unprovoked. Valpine took the letter up, and having perused it—"By heavens! my dear," said he exultingly, "this is as it should be. Reybridge must never see this letter; and every future epistle from this old dotard must be intercepted. I tell you, Mrs. Valpine, the youth is on his last legs; this morning he has lost 400*l.* at billiards; and, to his utter confusion and astonishment, on applying to Critchill and Vines for the money, they showed him his account, by which it appeared, after the most correct examination, and a production of the different vouchers, that he had not more than 325*l.* remaining in their possession. This sum he, however, instantly deposited in our friend Robert Milcham's hands, together with his promissory note for the payment of the re-

maining 75*l.* in a fortnight. In his despair, poor lad, he quite forgot that his friend Dr. Monford, to whom I am persuaded it was his intention to have applied for the money, had been suddenly called to London on a lawsuit, which to my knowledge will detain him there six months:—besides, before his return, it shall go hard, but I will raise such a storm of indignation in the bosom of old Denham against him, as shall completely destroy both his credit and his hopes. In the mean time, it will be necessary to keep his head a little above water, to save appearances:—for it must be believed, you know, my dear, that so far from having contributed to his imprisonment, we have used every exertion to preserve him therefrom."—"Imprisonment!" interrupted the lady, fury flashing from her eyes, "what mighty good can be done by imprisoning, unless you could bring the blockhead to the gallows? And pray, what satisfaction will it be to me for the insult I

have received from this filthy old puritanical parson?"—"The greatest in the world, my dear," replied Valpine, "as you will shortly own: but we must go safely over the ground, and affect a little pity and forbearance, if we have it not. In truth, my love, if you had been a man, you'd have made an excellent lawyer."—"None of your gibes, Mr. Valpine," rejoined the still incensed wife, "none of your wheedling bamboozling tricks with me! I say, I am resolved to be revenged! Hateful, indeed! an old hypocrite, with his sanctity and fulsome cant!"—"Have patience, Mrs. Valpine," rejoined the husband, "you have often promised to leave all matters that relate to a *certain business* to me. You may depend upon being amply revenged; and so will I too, for more than one good turn I owe to this all-benevolent Mr. Denham."—And here then sat upon Mr. Valpine's visage a smile of such genuine malignity, that his amiable partner retired, fully confident,

that whatever his plan might be, it was fraught with as much vindictive malice and cruelty as she could reasonably wish to have inflicted on her bitterest enemy. Poor Ralph was no sooner ruined, than he obtained that secret so rarely purchased but by severe experience, a knowledge of the real value, or rather the worthlessness, of every-day friends. With an aching heart he returned home from the billiard-table at which he had been plundered; but his honourable and generous spirit had formed no idea of the base desertion that was to succeed a misfortune so deplorable. What then was his consternation to find himself, the morning after, shunned as a nuisance by the very persons whose debts he had often paid, and on whom he had placed his entire confidence! His dear friend Jack, and his good fellow Tom, and his honest boy Harry, no longer held out the hand of welcome, but Sir'd and Mister'd him with as much

coldness and affected surprize, as if they had never seen him before.

In vain the poor youth now looked forward to the only consolation under his grievances, a letter of pardon from his venerable tutor; from whom he no longer concealed his guilt, but with real contrition wrote a confession of all his faults, and in the most melting and affecting language implored the good man's forgiveness; requesting, at the same time, to be put to the meanest employment, that by his cheerful resignation to the labour assigned him, he might evince the sincerity of his repentance. Three miserable weeks elapsed without any answer arriving to this petition; and, indeed, it would have been surprizing if one had come, for the letter had been delivered to the servant to carry to the post-office, who conveyed it, according to previous orders, to Mr. Valpine, who committed it, to the flames.

But what were the feelings of Mr. Denham to find, that, so far from attending to his commands to quit the Valpines, he did not think fit to answer his letter! A second, third, and fourth, were written without a reply; yet still he heard, not only from Dr. Monford, but the bankers at Shrewsbury, that the young spendthrift was well, but wholly absorbed in his dissipated pursuits.

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed the good man to himself, on perusing the last accounts of him, "can it then be possible, that depravity has succeeded to intemperance? In so short a time have his principles been corrupted, his heart hardened?" A hope still remained. Ralph might not have received his letters; and as it happened about this time that a friend of the old rector's, a Mr. Shepperton, had come to visit him at Rothwell Castle, and was proceeding into Wales, he engaged him to make such inquiries personally at Shrewsbury, concerning our

hero, as should leave no doubt as to his innocence or guilt.

Reybridge, in the mean time, was in a state little short of distraction; he found himself abandoned by those he had even treated as his intimates; and even Mr. Denham had apparently forsaken him. Mr. and Mrs. Valpine, it is true, still protected him, but he now felt the misery of a dependent situation, and sickened at the idea. Mr. Melcham, in the mean time, took an opportunity one evening, at Mr. Valpine's house, of throwing out some very broad hints about the payment of the 75*l*. due to him, and our poor hero, driven to the last extremity, was obliged to have recourse to his *guardian* for his advice and assistance.

Valpine told him to be comforted. "I will go myself," said he, "to Melcham, and try what is to be done. I have not so much money as the sum you mention by me, or I would pay it for you, with the greatest pleasure. At all events do not

be apprehensive of any *personal* inconvenience, as my bail will always be your security."—"You are very kind, my dear friend," replied Ralph, "and relieve my mind extremely, by this benevolent assurance."—"Not at all, not at all," returned the good gentleman, "do not mention it. I am your friend, Reybridge; and—but tell me, when did you hear last from your tutor?"—"Alas! Sir," replied Ralph, "I fear I have offended him beyond forgiveness; for he has long since ceased to write to me, and I have every reason to apprehend, that having heard of my extravagance and folly, he has discarded me from his confidence for ever."—"No doubt, he has so," replied Valpine, "and what regard can you retain for a man who harbours a resentment against you in the very face of the religion he professes; and for a few trifling irregularities leave you to struggle with poverty and shame? It is plain he only wanted an excuse to get rid of you altogether, for he always hated

me, and has *now* no earthly reason to love you."—" What reason," returned Reybridge, " had he at any time to love me?" —" The best in the world," replied Valpine, " while Mrs. Reybridge lived, for, ignorant till her death that she was supported by an annuity, he very naturally concluded that he should be liberally rewarded for your education: but he has now neither time nor inclination to continue those irksome and useless professions of regard for you, and though I do not think the worthy man bears you any serious ill-will, rely upon it, Ralph, he does not care one farthing about you."— " Good God!" exclaimed our hero, " it surely cannot be possible; nor can I ever believe it. I have, it is true, but too lately been wofully and miserably deceived, but Mr. Denham! assuredly *his* friendship was ever pure and disinterested."—" The idea is chimerical, Reybridge," returned the other; " friendship is the common term for mutual con-

venience; and, however a parcel of romantic fools may gloss it over, it is still founded on *self*. All mankind are subject to the infirmities which are inherent in their natures, and it is folly and presumption to boast a resolution to subdue them; these infirmities all centre in selfishness, and selfishness will predominate, and show itself from beneath the closest disguise."

Ralph had no spirits to reply to this fine piece of oratory: Mr. Valpine accordingly left him, to find out Mr. Melcham, and endeavour to put the debt due to him into a train of liquidation. How far he succeeded will appear by the following letter which our hero received a little time after from the worthy creditor, and which ran as follows:—

"TO MR. REYBRIDGE.

"Sir,

"Business of great consequence calling me to London, I must beg you will take

up your note to me for 75*l.* as soon as possible; the bearer is authorised to receive the money and give the proper acknowledgment.

"I am, Sir,

"Your very obedient servant,

"ROBERT MELCHAM."

Shrewsbury, Friday noon.

Reybridge was thunderstruck by this billet, and desired to see the person who had brought it. A shabby looking fellow immediately made his appearance. "Pray, my friend," cried our hero, "when does Mr. Melcham leave Shrewsbury?"—"That's more than I know, Sir," replied the other; "but I take it about to-morrow."—"I wish very much to see him on the subject of the letter you have brought me," rejoined Ralph; "and I beg you will inform him, friend, that it is my intention to call at his house to-morrow morning early, when I hope to satisfy him fully in regard to the con-

tents." Here the man hesitated; and after a little time employed in scratching his head, replied—"Well, Sir, I shall tell Mr. Melcham what you say, and if you hear nothing further from me, 'tis odds but he'll expect to see you." Reybridge was by no means comforted by this speech; the fellow had every appearance of being a bailiff, and he sat a long time deliberating, whether he should stir from the house the next morning or not. At length he decided that there might be more eventual danger in breaking than attending to his own appointment, and he accordingly determined to go. The following day was remarkably fine: our poor hero, summoning all his courage, set out for the house of his creditor, not without cherishing a hope, as he went along, that the catalogue of misfortunes he was prepared to enumerate would move the tiger's heart, but he had scarcely walked the length of the street, when the same

man that had called upon him the day before, addressed him in his true capacity, and by virtue of a writ, and a couple of stout followers, conducted the disconsolate youth to prison.

CHAP. XVII.

The arrival of Mr. Shepperton, and the fair trial and condemnation of our hero. —He is finally renounced by his tutor, but is preserved from absolute despair by the unexampled, unexpected, and altogether unaccountable beneficence of Mr. Valpine.

Now it so fell out, that Mr. Denham's friend, Shepperton, the same who had been deputed by the good clergyman to inquire into the true state of matters at Shrewsbury, arrived at the Crown Inn just as the person who had called upon Ralph with the letter from his creditor was returning with our hero's answer; and both entered the coffee-room together, where stood Mr. Melcham by the fire reading the newspaper.

"The young gentleman won't come to, Sir," exclaimed the messenger; "I doubt we must have him in limbo. 'Squire Valpine was at home, and so I thought to have proceeded to business then; but young master said he could settle all particulars with you, if so be you'd allow him to see you to-morrow morning."—"You did wrong, Clinch," replied Melcham, "to pay any attention to this humbugging stuff. See me, indeed! you must know very well it can only be for wheedling, and to endeavour to trick me out of my due; but I have no time to lose in listening to his excuses and palavering nonsense; and so, Mr. Clinch, you must talk to the young spendthrift. I will teach him to boast of being able to beat me at *my own* weapons." The bailiff, thus tutored, withdrew, and Mr. Shepperton, who had no longer any doubt but that Reybridge was the unfortunate young man alluded to, begged Mr. Melcham to inform him how long he had known the

youth against whom he was about to proceed so roughly, and whether he was so totally destitute of friends that no charitable person could be found to bail him?" Melcham having regarded Mr. Shepperton for some minutes, and observing he was a stranger, "Why, truly, Sir," said he, "it will seem odd at first, that a youngster, just turned of age, should be considered a fit object for a jail; but though, Sir, I have not known *Ralph Reybridge* above five months, I have seen enough of him, in that time, to be convinced he is a sly hand, and if I did not lay him by the heels, he would soon find means to *fob* me out of my money. Master Ralph, I suppose, thought I was a *pigeon*, but I can handle a cue, and rattle the *bones*, as well as any man in England."—"If I understand you rightly, Sir," replied Shepperton, "it should seem that this Mr. Reybridge is a professed gamester, and with no very great character to lose?"—"Character!" returned Melcham, "ha!

ha! ha! a good joke indeed. Why, I tell you, Sir, if he was not the slipperiest young rogue in the country, I might be induced to have some compassion on him, but I think it a public duty to put such a scamp out of harm's way. And, after all, if the young dog can but find his wench and his bottle in prison, he will be as happy there as any where else." Mr. Shepperton was rather slower in giving credit to these liberal attestations of Mr. Melcham than that illustrious personage designed he should, and, though disgusted by the obvious scurrility and personal enmity of the creditor's speech, yet he had heard enough to convince him that more was true than was necessary to convict Ralph in the opinion of his reverend friend. His principal object, however, was to find out whether ingratitude towards the good man was to be added to his list of offences; and, in order to ascertain this point, he determined not only to see Mr. Valpine, but also the young

man himself; and accordingly sat down in one of the boxes of the coffee-room, and dispatched the following note to the house of the former gentleman:

"Mr. Shepperton having been requested by the Rev. Mr. Denham to make some inquiries concerning Mr. Ralph Reybridge, will thank Mr. Valpine to inform him when and where he may have half an hour's conversation with him and the young man in question."

Crown Inn, May 4, 17—.

To this note, Mr. Valpine, who happened to be at home when it was brought to him, after some consideration, returned an answer as follows:

"Mr. Valpine is sorry that business of consequence will prevent him the pleasure of seeing Mr. Shepperton to-day, but will

be at his commands to-morrow morning at half past ten, A. M."

No. 5, Queen Street.

As our sagacious readers may very fairly presume that Mr. Valpine was well acquainted with the proceedings and ultimate determination of Mr. Melcham, they will not be surprized that the former should have deferred receiving Mr. Denham's ambassador till after that determination had been carried into effect, and which he soon received intelligence would take place the morning following, on Ralph's way to Melcham's lodgings. A meeting, indeed, between our hero and his tutor's friend, might not have taken place without some explanations not altogether advantageous to himself, and as he conceived himself sufficiently qualified to answer any inquiries a stranger could possibly have to make, concerning the poor youth, he prudently determined to have

him safely *housed* before hand, to prevent the possibility of a misunderstanding. Our hero was, therefore, no sooner cast into prison the next day, than Mr. Shepperton made his appearance, punctual to Mr. Valpine's appointment; as neither of the gentlemen was in a disposition to pay many compliments, Mr. Shepperton opened his business, by making some general inquiries regarding the conduct of young Reybridge for the last six months, which inquiries were answered by the other with so much moderation, and apparent tenderness to the poor lad's reputation, that Shepperton was inclined to think Mr. Denham must have been deceived in Mr. Valpine's character; but we have already expatiated upon our gentleman's insinuating qualities. "Well, Sir," observed Mr. Shepperton, after these preliminary inquiries, "the dissipation and extravagance of this young man, I am willing to believe, Mr. Denham would excuse on the score of his youth and inexperience, upon

his shewing a just sense of his folly, and promising amendment; but he will not so easily be brought to overlook shameful disrespect, neglect, and ingratitude!"—"He is perfectly safe, then, Sir," replied Valpine, "for these are crimes I am confident that Ralph can never have been guilty of."—"I am glad, Mr. Valpine, to hear you say so;" returned Shepperton; "and yet I have something to lay to his charge, which requires explanation before he can be honourably acquitted of these crimes.—Do you know, Sir, of his having received any letters within these two months from his tutor?"—"I do not, Sir," replied Valpine; "but as I never interfere with him in these matters, he may have received some unknown to me."—"Mr. Denham has, however, Sir," continued the other, "written to him several times; and though the letters were on subjects of the greatest importance, young Reybridge has neglected to reply to one of them; a circumstance in itself,

the situation of the respective parties considered, which, if he had received these epistles, must convict him of the blackest ingratitude."—"Depend upon it, Mr. Shepperton," replied Valpine, "they never could have come to his hands, for though the young man has been a little extravagant, I will stake my life on the goodness of his heart, and the sincerity of his respect and affection for Mr. Denham. However, to end all our scruples, we will question Ralph himself on the subject. He is, no doubt, in his own room, for he seldom goes out so early."—"I will attend you, Sir," answered Shepperton; "and if he can settle this business to my satisfaction, I will myself rescue him this time from his hard-hearted creditor." Here Mr. Valpine gave a very natural stare of surprize; and upon the other's explaining his meaning, "Alas!" replied he, "who would have thought a few occasional parties of pleasure could have done so much mischief. I doubt, Sir,

Mr. Denham believes me chiefly to blame in this affair; but I assure you, Mr. Shepperton, on the *honour of a gentleman*, my conscience fully acquits me." To this honourable declaration, Mr. Shepperton made no reply, and they proceeded together to our hero's chamber; the door was wide open, but no Ralph appeared; every thing, however, in his room had the appearance of negligence and confusion: his books were thrown on one side, his clothes on another, and papers of different sorts were scattered about. Among numberless smaller notes thrown under the grate of the fire-place, lay several letters, some open, and some torn; epistles which Mr. Denham had written to Ralph subsequently to that which had been originally intercepted by Mr. Valpine. How they came reduced to their present mutilated and degraded state, and for what purpose to answer, our sagacious readers will scarcely require to be informed. None other of the rector's letters were to be

found; for, in fact, poor Ralph had, previously to his going out that morning, taken them away with him, that in case an accident should happen to him, he might not be without their consoling influence in his prison.

Shepperton having paused a moment to contemplate so unquestionable a proof of our hero's ingratitude, turned towards Mr. Valpine, who appeared overwhelmed with shame and confusion, and asked him if he had any objection to his taking the abused fragments to their much injured writer. "The conviction," said he, "of this young villain's depravity will, I am aware, be painful to the worthy man; but justice demands that the mildness of his nature should no longer be abused. I am not prepared to offer you any advice, Mr. Valpine, on this subject; but I am of opinion myself that no steps whatever should be taken, at present at least, to rescue this wretch from the danger that hangs over him. Perpetual im-

prisonment falls far short of the punishment such baseness deserves: towards a man, too, that would have taken him to his bosom as to the bosom of a father, and shared with him every comfort of life."

Thus saying, he put the letters in his pocket, took a hasty leave, and getting into a post-chaise pursued his journey into Wales, from whence he dispatched a packet into Northamptonshire, the contents of which proved a greater trial of our good rector's fortitude than almost any other calamity that could have befallen him.

For the first week of our hero's confinement, he experienced none of those indulgences which a good purse of money would have procured him: the room he inhabited was dark, cold, and cheerless; a truckle bed and a chair composed the whole of his furniture; bread and water his only food; the jailor was civil enough, but silent, and even surly, when impor-

tuned. Valpine not having seen, or even written to him in consequence of his misfortune, though he had on a former occasion promised to bail him, very much astonished the poor youth. A week had passed by, and no notice taken of him! "Surely," said he to himself, "it is impossible he can have resolved to abandon me in this miserable situation?" Whilst he was losing himself in painful conjectures of this nature, the jailor, on the seventh morning of his imprisonment, entered the room with brighter looks than it was usual for him to wear, and conducting him to a lower apartment well fitted up, and with a comfortable fire, begged to know what his honour would like for dinner that day? "for to be sure," continued the fellow, "you ha'nt a had many dainties for this week past."—"Nor shall I fatten on many now, I take it, my good friend," replied our hero; "for it should appear by all this attention, that you have had some misinformation about me.—I will

not profit however by your error.—I am not worth a shilling in the world."—"Well, well, young gentleman; replied the jailor, "*all's one for that*, perhaps your honour mayn't be quite so forsaken as you think.—Howsomever, I never meddles nor makes with other people's business; and if 'Squire Valpine and his good lady have turned out to be charity folk, why 'tisn't the first miracle that was ever wrought."—"You speak sharply, this morning, Mr. Jailor," returned Reybridge. "And so it is to the orders of Mr. Valpine that I must attribute this change?"—"Why, Sir," replied the jailor, "I must do him the justice to say it is; and more than that, I am pretty certain he means to free you from Master Milcham's clutches altogether, afore it be long."—"Generous man," rejoined Ralph, "how blind have I been to so much goodness!"—"Why for the matter of that," rejoined the keeper, "your honour is not the only person that have been long blind to it;

but there may be good reason for roasting of eggs, as the saying is."

But though our poor hero had now every thing he could wish for in his prison, he was unable to account for his benefactor's non-appearance; the sad idea too of having perhaps for ever lost Mr. Denham's confidence and regard, was not to be counterbalanced by any future hopes or expectations.

The next morning put him in possession of a letter, which confirmed his worst apprehensions. It was from his tutor, and he opened it with as much fear and trembling as if the contents were to decide upon his life or death. A criminal, indeed, reprieved, by mistake, with the halter round his neck, could scarcely have experienced a more bitter pang than the following words inflicted upon him:

"When I consider that you were once dear to me, and that I have had the misfortune to bestow on you an education

which may be the means of making you feel your present disgrace more poignantly than might otherwise, have been the case, I conceive it right and just that I should release you from the same; and I inclose for that purpose a note for 100*l.* which I am told will be amply sufficient. I shall still pray for you, and as a Christian forgive you; but we must *never meet again,* for where there is no longer confidence, there can be no longer friendship.

"Farewell!

"CHARLES DENHAM."

Rothwell Castle, May 13, 17—.

After the first conflict of affliction, our hero began to scrutinize his conduct, and though he saw in it enough to condemn, yet allowing for the warmth of his constitution, the openness of his disposition, and his total want of worldly experience, he could not but feel shocked at the severity of his tutor's decision. A decision so unlike what he might have expected from a heart so benevolent, a temper so

mild, and a judgment so considerate and correct. These considerations stirred up somewhat of an innate pride that had long laid dormant in Ralph's bosom; and he was deliberating on what was best to be done with the bank note inclosed in the letter, when the door opened, and Mr. Valpine, with a face dressed up with unusual smiles of complacency, entered the room.—Reybridge sprang forward immediately to receive him; and squeezing him affectionately by the hand, "My dear friend," exclaimed he, "how rejoiced am I to see you at last.—I am convinced you must have been prevented by some urgent business from coming to me before."—"You are right, my dear Ralph," answered Valpine, "and much I assure you has the circumstance grieved me; but I hope I shall be able, before we now part, to satisfy you that I ever have been, and ever wish to be, your sincere friend." Here the jailor entered the room, and Ralph took the opportunity of observing

that he had been treated by the honest man with great kindness and attention, lately. "Why your honour is pleased to say so," replied the worthy keeper, "but *all's one for that.*—I was always of a compassionate disposition, and he must be a devil indeed that would not give the best he had, whether paid for or not, to such a handsome gentleman as your honour," Here a noise from the room underneath interrupted the benevolent speaker, who immediately running to the stair-head bawled out with stentorian lungs, "Bet, if that there spindle shank'd officer can't muster no more money, why d'ye see I can't afford to feed him like a Christian upon beef and pudding every day.—If there's a bit of the pig's cheek in the pantry, you may *gi'* it him if you like."—"This poor gentleman, I take it," observed our hero, as the jailor returned, "has not much *beauty* to boast of. Hey, friend?"—"Aye, aye," rejoined Cerberus, "you are a wag, young gentleman,

you are a wag I see.—But thof, as I said before, I'll defy any man to be more compassionate, yet the means must be forthcoming—that your honour will allow, to be sure; thanks to my dame's prudence, I am not so poor neither as many as have had a better *education*: yet taxes must be paid, and children will eat: but howsomever, as I said afore, *all's one for that*."

Valpine now made a motion for the orator to withdraw, and being left alone with Ralph, drew his chair closer to him and began as follows:

"My dear boy, fortune has at length put it in my power to be of service to you in no small degree, without the least inconvenience to myself or to Mrs. Valpine, who very cordially acquiesces in the arrangement I have made in your favour. I have procured for you, if you choose to accept of it, the situation of a free merchant to India; and have determined, moreover, in consideration of your being

virtually *my* ward, agreeably to Mrs. Reybridge's dying words, to fit you out for your voyage, and to furnish you with a little capital of 1000*l.* which, with good care and management, you may, in a very short time, convert to a comfortable, if not a splendid fortune. I have already written to a friend of mine, Mr. Horton, who is a clerk at the India House, and well acquainted with all the necessary forms. You will reside with him, during your stay in London, and he will in my name not only pay you the 1000*l.* in question, but defray every little extra expence you will be necessarily put to, and take care that you have every accommodation requisite for your voyage. I have only now to add, that a fleet of Indiamen for Madras, to which place you will go, sails in the course of a fortnight, and that Captain Daventry of the Phœnix will be happy to receive you as his passenger, should you be inclined to accept of the best establishment I can think of for insuring your

future happiness and prosperity." To our hero, who a few days before had considered himself a wretched prisoner for life, indigent, obscure, and abandoned by every body, what a joyful surprize was this! To be thus suddenly raised from indigence and obscurity, to an independency and a distinction in society; to prospects the most flattering! and by Valpine too? "Great God!" exclaimed he, after a pause of astonishment, "are you, Sir, can you be serious?"—"Would I jest with you, Ralph, in your present situation?" replied Valpine, "No, by heaven!—How often have I told you that to see you happy was my principal aim.—Whilst I supposed that your tutor, through the influence of Lord Ardendale, might be able to place you in an eligible and respectable line of life at home, I did not think it could possibly be for your advantage to interfere; but it was high time, when I saw these prospects at an

end, and you were deserted by him at a time when you should have been most carefully and anxiously attended to, to give you a more substantial proof of regard than can be afforded by mere profession.—I loved and respected Mrs. Reybridge; I avowed to protect her charge to the utmost of my power, and I will fulfil the sacred duty."—"Oh, Sir," cried Ralph, falling on his knees and kissing Valpine's hand, "what can I say to you?—I accept with heart-felt gratitude your noble benefaction."—"Enough;" replied Valpine, "and as this is the case, I have further to inform you that you are no longer Mr. Milcham's debtor, and are at liberty to depart from hence whenever you please. Indeed it will be necessary you should go to town either to-morrow or the next day; and as I shall not wish you to break in upon the 1000*l.* Mr. Horton has got for you, here is a fifty pound note to defray accidental expences

till you sail." So saying, he slipped the note into Ralph's hand, and then seeing him more and more astonished, he continued; "Come, come, Reybridge, when you are rich you shall repay me, so let us be gone. Mrs. Valpine, believe me, will be as happy as I am to hear you have agreed to my proposals." Here the condition of the poor officer, of whom our hero had heard so brief and unsatisfactory an account, from the jailor, rushed across his mind, and turning to his benefactor, "Have you," said he, hesitatingly, "any objection to my inquiry, before I finally quit the prison, into the condition of the poor soldier below?"—"Not in the least," replied Valpine, "but have a care, Ralph; impostors are found in prisons as well as other places; therefore be cautious. In my opinion you had better get rich before you begin to be charitable; but, as you please. When you have satisfied your curiosity, you will find me at the Crown."

The worthy, and as our readers will by this time think incomprehensible gentleman, then walked off, and Reybridge, conducted by the now obsequious jailor, proceeded to the officer's apartment.

CHAP. XVIII.

What passed between Reybridge and the officer in prison, and a friendship formed of as much importance to the ensuing pages of this history as any one incident therein contained.

On our hero's entrance into this melancholy abode, it was with some difficulty he discerned, in one corner of it, a very emaciated man in an old uniform coat, lying upon a miserable bed, and apparently asleep. The noise of people approaching, however, induced him to look up, and observing an elegant young man by his side, he sprung from his recumbent posture, and requested to know his commands. Ralph having motioned the keeper to withdraw, proceeded to apologize for his intrusion.—"I am aware, Sir,"

said he, mildly, "that visits from strangers, on occasions like the present, proceed frequently from an impertinent curiosity; but, while I confess I have been curious to see you, believe me I would have suppressed my desire, had it not been accompanied by an anxious inclination to serve you."—"Pray, young gentleman," replied the officer, "be seated," pointing to the remains of an old chair, the only one in the room.—"I am induced, from your countenance, to believe what you say, though I confess I am somewhat surprized that a man so young as you appear to be, should find time to think upon any thing but his own pleasures!"—"You deem it, then, impossible, Sir," replied Ralph, "that any pleasure should result from bestowing as well as tasting happiness?"—"Why not so;" rejoined the stranger, "but I am much mistaken, if you, my young friend, have seen much of human nature; the pleasure you allude to, which is that of relieving distress, might have been a

more active impulse of the heart, had it not long since been superseded by the more weighty gratifications of pride, vanity, and ambition.—The professions of arms and letters are continually giving delight, instructing, entertaining, and depopulating the world at the same time; whilst honours and rewards await them, and their names are handed down to posterity.—Who then, having once tasted and imparted such delights, would be content with the lukewarm occupation of relieving from affliction and penury the disabled, the aged, the sick, and the poor? and with no other premium, no other praise to look forward to, than these desolate people's blessings?—From these circumstances, therefore, I must conclude, young man, that you are yet a novice in this superior delight of giving and receiving, or you would never have thought of visiting, for the purpose of assisting him, a poor half-starved soldier, in a prison."—

"Alas! my dear Sir," replied Ralph,

"I am not such a novice but I can comprehend the severity of your remark.—Your whole appearance bespeaks you one of those disregarded objects of merit; who have felt, and are still shrinking under, the world's oppression. You have judged truly of me in regard to general experience; yet even I have not escaped the trammels of falsehood and injustice: else, is it possible that I should, for faults, unstained at least by actual depravity, have been so utterly abandoned, by my more than father? No, my dear tutor, assuredly you have been deceived in me."—"That I'll be bound for;" returned the stranger with energy, "or I have no knowledge of physiognomy.—I have no right, young Sir, to take advantage of this readiness to communicate with me; but I own I should like to know something more about you. Indeed, to tell you the truth, I have been so little accustomed to meet with hearts like yours, that I am inclined to think this tutor you mention

has had his eye more to your eternal than your temporal happiness."—"Indeed, Sir, I'm convinced he has;" replied Ralph, "and yet I have been led to suspect, by a friend too, who has this very morning given me the most noble proof of his disinterested regard, that this very tutor has deceived and abandoned me, because it is no longer of advantage to himself to save me."

Our hero then, without entering into particulars, gave a general outline of his life; neither omitting the circumstances of his birth, nor those of his benefactress's death; Valpine's behaviour, on all occasions; his own follies and extravagancies; and Mr. Denham's formal renunciation in consequence. The stranger listened to his narrative with great attention; then, after a pause of considerable length; "I am very much surprized," said he, "at many parts of your story.—In the conduct of Valpine, indeed, there are so many contradictions, that I know not how to

reconcile it upon any one principle of worldly policy. Depend upon it, however, it is too singular and mysterious to admit of a fair interpretation. Some *end* to himself is to be answered by it, which Providence will, one day or another, doubtless, discover; in the mean time, I would not advise you, in your present situation, to reject the India scheme; there can be no deception in that, as you must necessarily receive your credentials from a great and public body of men: shall I go further, and tell you my thoughts?"—"You cannot, dear Sir, oblige me more," replied Ralph. "My opinion is, then," returned the officer, "that by some means, utterly impossible for us at present to discover, the worthy Mr. Denham, for worthy beyond dispute he is, has been deceived in you. His letter implies a breach of confidence and gratitude on your part, which, if you have candidly related your story, you have not been guilty of; notwithstanding, therefore, this good man's

present opinion of you, I would strongly advise you to write to him again; explain to him the whole of Valpine's behaviour to you, and request to know if he has received any other account of you besides that which was the subject of your own confessional letter to him in the hour of your distress. I can never believe he received that letter."—"Good God! Sir," interrupted Ralph, "you astonish me! He must have received it, for I gave it with my own hands into those of the servant's, to carry to the post-office."—"And why did you not go with it yourself?" demanded the stranger: "Ah! my young friend, little are you yet aware of the villainy of the world; I have long been a wretched wanderer on its surface; and long has experience, with an iron hand, been qualifying me to see deeply into the designs of men. Of Valpine I must yet suspend my opinion; I would not rashly influence your judgment, or suppress those acknowledgments you think are his

due; but do not put your confidence in him too much, till you see how matters turn out: above all, remember to convey your next letter to the post-office yourself."

Here the stranger paused, and our hero was about to reply, when he observed the tears standing in his new friend's eyes, as if occasioned by some sudden recollection of his own misfortunes. The officer felt them and renewed his discourse. "Upon pride, selfishness, and insensibility, my story would produce little good; but your mind Mr. Reybridge, seems cast in a different mould, and will, at least, deduce this moral from it; 'that it is always dangerous to reject that establishment in life, through caprice or fancy, to which you may have been called by prudence and duty.'—My name is Fitzallen; my father was a clergyman residing on a small living near the town of Limerick, in Ireland, and on the banks of the river Shannon; I was his only child, and as he had been

promised for me, by the Bishop of the diocese, an eligible curacy, and the reversion of the benefice, provided I was bred to the church, he gave me an education accordingly. But notwithstanding all his paternal care and attention, I frequently expressed an unwillingness to take the gown; prompted by my vanity to imagine I had talents too bright and versatile for the becoming gravity of a clergyman, and that I was better calculated for a profession of activity, where freedom of opinion on all great and general subjects would give ample scope to the energy of my mind.—Fatal and destructive delusion, which gradually led me from wickedness to wickedness, and has now left me to struggle with the bitterest misery!

"During one of my college vacations, I obtained my father's permission to visit a relation of my mother's, residing at Dublin. This gentleman, though he had contrived to conceal his infamous principles from my father, was a free-thinker

in the vilest sense of the word; for he would occasionally proclaim his blasphemies aloud, without respect to persons, and in open defiance of all common decency. This wretch, before I had lived with him a month, contrived to make me think as freely, and chatter as impiously as himself. To act the canting hypocrite in a long gown, for thus my most honourable cousin was wont to speak of the clergy, was now an occupation that my *principles*, as well as inclination, revolted at; and I did not scruple (Oh, God forgive me!) to utter my execrable sarcasms even in mocking of my much-abused and indulgent father! Infidelity is the parent of every vice that is degrading to human nature. Once satisfied of the absurdity of admitting the providence of a Supreme Being, and a future distribution of rewards and punishments, man basely tramples upon reason, the noblest prerogative of his nature, yields himself up to every species of corrupt and abandoned profli-

gacy, and becomes worse, ten thousand times worse, than the beasts of the desert. —Alas! Mr. Reybridge, I was, for a while, this wretch.—I became a drunkard, a gamester, a sensualist, and a blasphemer. My passions were restrained by no one principle of honour; and to attain the gratification of my pleasures, I would not have shrunk from the commission of the worst of crimes! Sometimes my conscience, in spite of every thing, would reproach me; but I then fled to the fiend that had undone me, and his *modern philosophy* silenced every whisper. Satiated with common indulgences, I made use of those talents I was so proud of, for the purposes of seduction, and got involved in several duels in attempting to corrupt the wives and daughters of my friends. It was on one of these occasions that my deluded father first became acquainted with my apostacy. He wrote to me, more in grief than in anger, conjuring

me to return to him, if I had a spark of virtue or humanity left alive in my breast: I had not; for I neglected even to reply to his letter. Not long after this, my debaucheries, and my attempts to justify them, on the ground of my abandoned principles, became so notorious, that the worst accounts of me could no longer be concealed from my venerable parent, and he never after held up his head! A second letter was immediately dispatched to me by this injured good old man, in which, after having painted to me in the strongest colours the enormity of my crimes, he informed me that I had broken his heart, but that he was determined I should not embitter his last moments by my presence; that if I offered to intrude upon him, either personally or by letter, from that moment he would denounce that terrible curse upon my head, which, by my iniquity and barbarous ingratitude, I had already too richly merited. On the other hand, he acquainted me that his banker at

Dublin had received directions to purchase for me, if I chose it, a commission in a marching regiment, and to supply me with 500*l.* besides. I confess, so completely had the vile principles instilled into my mind deadened in me every sensation of pity, gratitude, and natural affection, that I read this dreadful epistle with little emotion, and indeed was well pleased to conform to the stipulations therein contained. Soon, however, did the just vengeance of Heaven pursue me! I had scarcely been an ensign in the regiment six weeks when news was brought me of my father's death, but that his last words had breathed, instead of curses on my head, a blessing and forgiveness!—Gracious Heaven! what were then my torments! the black cloud of impiety, with all its attendant vices, vanished before the anguish and remorse that oppressed me, and the bitter tears of repentance were shed too late. I had been the murderer of the best of fathers, and

despair and horror seized me. To the first paroxysms of my grief succeeded a gloomy determination to revenge myself on the villain that had first misled me: I accordingly, having obtained leave of absence from my regiment, quartered at that time at Meath, and furnished myself with a brace of pistols, set off for Dublin, the scene of my former depravities, where I found Mr. Howell (for this was the name of my villainous relation) preparing to set off for his country seat, about thirty miles from the capital. It was not without difficulty that I persuaded him to accompany me to a little distance from the metropolis, on pretence of having some important business to impart to him; and when we were arrived at a convenient spot, I suddenly produced my pistols, which I had previously loaded, and commanded him to take one, and defend himself, or I would lodge the contents in his breast without further ceremony. He endeavoured to expostulate, but I was in

no temper to hear excuses which I knew would be unavailing. I told him to turn to his diabolical principles, to his *philosophical* code, and then to the grave of my sainted father, for an explanation; and, retiring a few paces back, fired, and shot him through the lungs. He fell instantly, but not before he had returned the compliment, his ball passing below my right hip. It was some time before any body came to our assistance, and it is probable we should both have bled to death, had not a boy, who was playing in an adjoining field, observed us, and given the alarm at a public house, to which we were immediately removed.

"I pass by a period of six months, during which I suffered greatly from my wound, as did also my wretched cousin from his, which was even more desperate than mine. At length we were both relieved from our tortures, but Howell, whether from an apprehension of further violence from me, or whether a remorse of

conscience had visited him during his confinement, quitted Dublin, from that period, altogether, to reside on a small estate at the extremity of the kingdom, where, it came to my knowledge only a few days ago, he died.—Miserable man! may Heaven have received thy last, though late repentance!

"During my long illness, the Father of all Mercy was pleased to assist my endeavours in acquiring a just sense of the heinousness of my former errors. My comprehension was not slow, and my understanding had only been perverted. I read books of fine and sound morality, and the more I read, the more was I amazed, that the incongruous jargon of the modern philosophers' hypothesis should have been tolerated one moment by a common reflecting understanding.

"In consequence of my conversion, which, on my re-appearance among my brother officers, was soon discovered; I was, at first, the object of their derision:

but a perseverance in temperance and rational pursuits changed, by degrees, this derision to respect; for it is the peculiar property of virtuous behaviour to command esteem and respect even from the most dissolute; whilst, on the other hand, a vicious conduct, though wealth, power, and connexion, may procure it an outward triumph, is secretly despised.

"But though my repentance was sincere, my former crimes were not to pass unpunished. My life has since been a perpetual scene of fatigue, danger, and disappointment. Without friends or interest, I have fought under the command of majors and lieutenant-colonels whom I had instructed in their duty as ensigns. I have served in fourteen different battles, abroad and at home, and have experienced every hardship of campaigns both in summer and winter. In short, I have been wounded in almost every part of my body, yet am I now sinking to the grave with only the half-pay of a lieutenant to sup-

port a wife and three children, who are this moment, for aught I know, perishing for bread in an obscure lodging in London. But I see, my young friend, you are affected; I will, therefore, hasten to the conclusion of my story. I had, till very lately, supported my dear Lucy and her little ones pretty well; for she is an excellent œconomist. Some debts however we were obliged to contract, owing to the scarcity of provisions; and one of my creditors becoming extremely importunate, I had the imprudence to reproach him. At the time he took no notice, but a few days ago I was destined to feel the full force of his malevolent retaliation.

"As I was returning from the city, where I had been on some private business of my own, a man stopped me in Fleet-street, and asked me if I had no recollection of him? I answered in the negative; he then informed me that his name was Mullins; and that he was in the service of Mr. Howell at the time I first came to

visit him in Dublin."—"I am very much surprized," continued he "to see you, Lieutenant, look so pale, thin, and so poorly clad. I was in hopes the legacy left you by your cousin would have enabled you to *pull up* a little."—"Cousin? good God!" replied I, "Is Mr. Howell dead?"

"At this question poor Mullins's astonishment was almost equal to my own. To be brief, he informed me that his old master had died several years ago in great agonies of remorse on account of his former wretched life, and had left me a legacy of 3000*l*. as some small atonement for the injuries he had done me; that as this piece of intelligence had been withheld from me, it was, doubtless, the intention of the scoundrel lawyer who drew up Mr. Howell's will, and had been appointed one of his executors, to withhold also the legacy. 'But lose no time, Sir,' continued my friend Mullins, 'in setting off for Dublin, where I know Crosbie, for that is the rascal's name, lives, and is at present in great

practice. It will, I think, be impossible for him, shrewd as he is, and clever at contrivances, to set aside your claim; but should he begin to start any objections, or fob you off with any evasions, just mention Pat Mullins's name to him, and that you can bring him over as an evidence in your favour, and don't doubt but he will acknowledge your right instantly." Conceive, Mr. Reybridge, my joy and astonishment at this unexpected piece of good news. I embraced my kind friend, and having taken his direction where to send to him, should his presence be necessary, I hastened home to my dear wife to inform her of the prospect of independence that was now opening to our view. No time was to be lost in making preparations for my departure to my native soil, and which I had quitted in disgust, as having been the theatre of all my misfortunes, but was now about to return to it, elated with the most flattering hopes and expectations. Every thing we possessed was immediately

converted into cash to provide for my journey, and the next day I found myself in possession of 30*l.* a sum which I calculated would be much more than I should require. My Lucy, however, was of a different opinion, nor could I, at parting, prevail upon her to take more for the support of herself and children during my absence than five guineas.

"As my safest route to Dublin was by Holyhead, I took my place in the Shrewsbury coach; and reserving only a little silver to defray my expenses on the road, I secured the rest of my fortune, being in bank notes, in my pocket book, and began my journey with a light heart and greater spirits than I had for many years experienced. Oh, with what joy did I look forward to the blissful moment, when, blessed with my little independence, I should be able to educate my children, and establish them in life, secure from the clamour of creditors, and the more intolerable contempt of an unfeeling world.

But my exultation was soon to have a fall. On my arrival at this place six days ago, on searching for my pocket book, containing my treasure, it was no where to be found. This misfortune, great as it was, I might, however, have surmounted; for I had fortunately paid for my passage all the way to Holyhead, and had still eighteen shillings in my pocket; but it was succeeded by a calamity, which none but a fiend, at such a moment, and knowing the misery of my situation, could have brought upon me.

"The merciless creditor whom I had so imprudently reproached, had left me with a smile of humility on his countenance, only that he might lull my suspicions of the diabolical revenge he from that moment determined to take upon me, when a proper opportunity should serve; the barbarous villain, therefore, no sooner obtained intelligence that I was setting off for Ireland, for the express purpose of recovering a fortune that would enable me to discharge

all my debts, than, no longer actuated by avarice, but the most cruel malice, for he well knew that any delay might frustrate my views, he followed me hither, and contrived to have me arrested for 42*l.* just as I was stepping into the coach to proceed on my journey! All the miseries of my former life were nothing in comparison with the anguish that now assailed me; but I will not obtrude the description of my sufferings on you, young gentleman, further than is necessary, for I see it gives you pain. Suffice it to say that, after the first tumults of my sorrow had somewhat subsided, I wrote to my poor wife, apprizing her of my misfortunes, and requesting that she would lay the matter before our neighbour, Mr. Staples, an attorney, and the only person we knew any thing about, in the hope, that when our future expectations should be represented to him, he might strike upon some method of liberating me from my present hopeless state. To this letter I yesterday received the

following reply, written by my eldest boy Tom. Mr. Fitzallen here pulled a small scrap of paper from his pocket, and read as follows:

"My dearest papa.

"My dear mamma bids me say that she is very ill of a fever, which prevents her writing to you, but that she has been praying to God Almighty to give her strength enough to come to you, if you will permit her: and Mr. Linwood the apothecary is very kind, and says he thinks she will soon be able. But don't grieve for us, dear papa, for we shall always be happy where you are, though we were to stay with you in prison all our lives. Mamma and little Harry and Emma send their kindest love and duty to you, and I am, dear papa,

"Your loving and dutiful son,

"THOMAS FITZALLEN."

Lawrence-court, Friday night.

"The measure of my woe was now filled up. The death of my beloved wife, under all the horrors of a raging fever; my famishing children crying vainly for bread, these were now the terrible forebodings of my disturbed imagination, and almost drove me to put a period to my miserable existence!—But the guardian angel that had before watched over and directed my thoughts shed, a second time, his divine influence on my mind, and I resigned myself to a punishment my conscience told me I deserved. Providence had allotted to me a calling, of all others, to a peaceable and virtuously disposed inclination, the most honourable and the most happy; and had I not ungratefully rejected this bountiful distinction, and preferred to the exalted duties of christianity, a life of idleness, uproar and bloodshed? Oh, yes!—for such a preference am I deservedly punished!—I ask not, I expect not a mitigation of my miseries, nor shall another murmur nor another tear escape

me!" Here the Lieutenant paused, and our hero, after wiping away the tears which this affecting recital had drawn forth, took the poor man's hand, and pressing it with great warmth—"Oh, Sir," said he "your melancholy story has penetrated my heart! but I will not waste time, which should be more actively employed, in vain professions. Here, dear Sir, take this bank note, putting into his hand that for 50*l*. which he had received from Valpine, and instantly liberate yourself. Fly to your wife and children, and pour comfort into their drooping spirits. To-morrow, I will myself follow you, and assist you with as much more as you may require for your expedition to Ireland!"

A faint glow spread itself over Fitzallen's face at the conclusion of these words. He gazed some minutes on Ralph's countenance, brightened up as it was by the warm emanations of benevolence; then, suddenly clasping him to his bosom, exclaimed—"Yes, my noble boy! dear, and

most benevolent friend, it were an insult to truth and honour to reject a bounty thus bestowed; but Fitzallen will remember it." then, falling on his knees, he continued some minutes in mental devotion; after which he sunk exhausted on his bed; where Reybridge left him, to arrange matters for discharging his debt, and to order some refreshments, and a post-chaise and four to convey him, as speedily as possible, to the arms of his lamenting wife and children.

CHAP. XIX.

Which treats of various important particulars, launches our hero into a world of adventures, and concludes the first volume.

No sooner was the Lieutenant sufficiently refreshed to begin his journey back to town, than, again fervently embracing his young benefactor, his debt and the customary fees having been discharged, he entered the post-chaise, and Ralph repaired to the Crown to join Mr. Valpine; but the gentleman was gone home, and our hero accordingly followed. His gratitude towards a man that was raising him from indigence to a comparative state of affluence, was still lively, notwithstanding the hints and cautions of Fitzallen. Both Mr. and Mrs. Valpine re-

ceived him with open arms on his return, but did not appear altogether so well pleased with the new acquaintance he had formed. Reybridge briefly related the circumstances of the poor officer's case, and what he had been compelled to do for him. He also informed Valpine of the bank-bill he had received from Mr. Denham, and that it was his intention to return it, but at the same time to inform him of the good fortune that had made his kind present unnecessary. "Besides," continued he, "I have reason to think Mr. Denham has not received some of my late letters; for if he had, I do not, I cannot believe he would have so suddenly abandoned me." Here the husband and wife exchanged looks, the full meaning of which, were I to explain it, would take up three or four pages of my paper. A pause succeeded, after which Mr. Valpine pursued the discourse. "Though I see no necessity," said he, "for your writing to your tutor on this subject, yet,

if you like it, I have no objection. Your letters to him might possibly have miscarried; but, if you put them in the post-office yourself, it is not likely."—"Alas! Sir, I did not," replied Ralph; "I gave them to James, your servant."—"Well, no matter," rejoined Valpine; "when do you purpose writing?"—"Not till I arrive in town," replied our hero, "and have a little settled myself. However determined my venerable master (for so I must still call him) may be to withhold his blessing and forgiveness, I am convinced he will not grieve to hear of your beneficence towards me. And now, dear Sir, as you have kindly informed me it is your intention to supply me with a capital of 1000*l.*, which, if I understand you rightly, I am to receive from the gentleman with whom I shall reside in town, will you and Mrs. Valpine have any objection to my appropriating one hundred thereof to the use of the worthy but distressed family I have mentioned? for,

though I might possibly have done this without your knowledge, yet I should by no means have conceived myself justified in the action."—"The money being yours, Ralph," replied Valpine, "I can have nothing further to say to the disposal of it. I shall give you a draft upon Mr. Horton, and you may then do with the amount what you please. But, pr'ythee, child, if you go on at this rate, how do you ever expect to make your fortune by trade? Merchants, Ralph, are governed by certain political laws, and revolve round the mighty emporium of commerce as planets round the sun, each pursuing his appointed course without deviation. These laws contain the grand mysteries of profit and loss, by an accurate knowledge of which the industrious computator is enabled to turn every contingency, however apparently unfavourable in the beginning, to his ultimate advantage. But you, my friend, are beginning your career in a retrograde motion,

Instead of considering how you are to make two out of one, you are diminishing your original stock, to the utter destruction of all order and system. Mercury will never protect such votaries, depend on it."—" I do not very well understand what you say, my dear Sir," replied our hero; " but, most assuredly, I shall never succeed as a merchant, or as any thing else, if I am to be so systematically saving as to shut my heart and my doors against the pleadings of want and misfortune. However, I have a much more pleasing idea of these commercial mysteries than you seem to entertain, and cannot help believing that the wealth which has ever made the British merchant respected at least, has oftener resulted from his integrity, liberality, and benevolence, than his most careful computations or speculative successes." To this Valpine only answered by a sneer, and, shifting the discourse, informed our hero, that, as he would have many things to do in London

previously to his embarkation at Portsmouth, where the Madras fleet at present lay at anchor, he should give him his dispatches to Mr. Horton that night, who would introduce him to Captain Daventry; and that he would advise him by all means to set out the next morning for the metropolis——" For although, my dear boy," continued he, " it will be grievous to Mrs. Valpine and me to part with you so suddenly, yet the movements of fleets are uncertain, and as the convoy is already, I understand, appointed, the orders for sailing may as reasonably be expedited as retarded."

Our hero was not displeased at this expedition, as he was anxious to see once more his new friend, the Lieutenant, for whose welfare he felt unusually interested. A place in the London coach was therefore immediately taken for him, and he was directed to be in readiness the following morning at five o'clock. On taking leave of his benefactors, Ralph was

much affected, and there was a confusion in the behaviour of the Valpines on this occasion; but whether it proceeded from regret at parting with our young adventurer, or from some other cause, we shall leave the reader to guess.

Reybridge, though grateful for the benefit thus rendered him, was not sorry to quit a country and people among whom he had never tasted any real pleasure, but, on the contrary, had experienced the greatest wretchedness, from his own follies, and the ingratitude of others. His journey, therefore, was far from being disagreeable, and he arrived at Mr. Horton's house in Cornhill, after travelling day and night, without much fatigue.

Reybridge, though he had been brought up in obscurity, and the constant habit of being with Mr. Denham had somewhat damped the natural ardour of his inclinations, wanted neither energy nor spirit when occasion called for their exertion; and, in his present circumstances, he re-

solved to lose no opportunities of making himself acquainted with men and things, and to qualify himself for the line of life he so suddenly found himself placed in. The same feelings, thus called into action, made him look forward, with the highest delight, to the change of scene and situation he was about to experience, and he almost began to fear, that one consequence of his tutor's forgiveness might be to put a stop to his voyage. With a cheerful countenance, therefore, he made his appearance in the parlour of Mr. Horton, just as that gentleman was sitting down to breakfast. Having announced himself, Horton welcomed him with more civility than cordiality, and, while he was reading Valpine's letter, cast such frequent and curious glances at our hero, that the youth, by no means pleased with his reception, turned upon his heel, and walked to the window. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Reybridge," exclaimed Horton, after reading the letter, "but your

friend Mr. Valpine gives so flattering a description of your person and manners."—" Pray, Mr. Horton," replied Ralph, interrupting him, " do not think of an apology. I doubt I am a curious figure, for I have not been able to change my dress during my journey. If you will allow one of your servants, therefore, to show me my room, I will make myself a little comfortable before I sit down to breakfast."—" By all means, my dear Sir," replied Horton, ringing the bell; " and, in the mean time, I will step to the India House, and see if your credentials are prepared. Mr. Crokum told me he should have them ready by to-day, and I assure you no time is to be lost, for the Phœnix arrived at the Motherbank yesterday, and there is no knowing how soon the fleet will sail, for the pursers have all left town with the Company's dispatches." He then hurried away, leaving our hero, who was totally unacquainted with the absurd and consequential

cant of these sprigs in office, in the greatest apprehension lest he should lose his passage. By the time he had dressed himself, Horton returned, and the gentlemen both sat down to breakfast. "Well, Mr. Reybridge," observed the communicative man of business, "I have been at the *House*, but nothing is done yet respecting your business, for Mr. Crokum, though the most punctual and obliging man alive, has been lately so overwhelmed with indispensable calls that have pressed upon him, that he has now scarcely a leg to stand upon. However, we shall get it over to-morrow."—"But, good God! Sir," replied Ralph, "shall I not be in danger of losing my passage? I am surprized my friend Mr. Valpine, who must long since have planned this generous arrangement in his own mind, did not inform me of it before; or that he should have suffered me to go to prison at all; for I take it for granted, Mr. Horton, that you are not unacquainted with this

circumstance of my disgrace."—" Why, not altogether," replied Horton, with some hesitation; " but as for Mr. Valpine's sudden determination in your favour, why it is a thing that happens, among whimsical men, every day. However, my dear Sir, do not be alarmed about the fleet; for, after all, I think it very probable you will not sail this month."—" Why, Sir," answered Ralph, whose respect for this worthy gentleman's talents did not quite amount to adoration, " I thought you hinted just now that it was *probable* the fleet would sail immediately, as the pursers had all left the India House."—" So I did, Sir," returned Horton, " that's very true; but the convoy is not quite ready, and, you know, my dear Sir, they may as well go without rudders as without a convoy." Our hero, who was already heartily tired of his new friend, and anxious to see Mr. Fitzallen again, now asked Horton if he could advance him 200*l*. in notes or cash, in part

payment of Mr. Valpine's draft upon him? "Assuredly I can, Sir," replied Mr. Horton, "but I was given to understand that you would not require any part of your capital, the whole of which I intended this morning to have presented to you in a bill payable at sight at Madras."—"I once thought so too," replied Ralph, "but circumstances have since occurred which would make the possession of the sum I have mentioned more convenient to me here. If you will let me have two hundred, I shall require no more money to answer every demand previous to my departure, clothes and other necessaries for my voyage excepted; and the remaining 800*l.* can be given me in the bill you mention, as well as the whole thousand." This proposal seemed to puzzle Mr. Horton; but he at length consented to it, and furnished our hero with the money required, with which Ralph instantly repaired in a hackney coach to Lawrence Lane.

Had we the pen of Sterne, we might possibly be tempted to give a description of the second meeting of Reybridge and the worthy lieutenant, now a joyful husband and father in the arms of his wife and children; but as his magic quill was buried with him, and we, with all our necromantic art, have no power to invoke it to our aid, the reader must be left as we have left him on other occasions, to his own imagination.

It was not till after repeated solicitations, that Fitzallen consented to receive the hundred pounds Ralph had provided for him; but the urgency of the case, the prospect which it opened to him of undertaking with greater convenience the object of his expedition to Ireland, and the noble and disinterested conduct of his benefactor, at length prevailed; and the worthy man, after forcing our hero to accept of a proper acknowledgment for 150*l*. received the additional supply.

It was immediately settled that Fitz-

allen should set off again for Shrewsbury that night, and that no fresh disaster might happen to him, he called in all his trifling debts, and having discharged them, sewed the remainder of his fortune, which he converted into bank notes, within the lining of his coat.

In the mean time Reybridge returned to Mr. Horton's, where a man attended according to appointment, to fit him out with linen, and all other conveniences for the voyage. He had made out an inventory which even Ralph thought crowded with many superfluities, but as Mr. Horton had seen and approved the articles, nothing would be objected to on his part. This weighty point being adjusted, he retired to his room and wrote, as he had been advised by Fitzallen, once more to his tutor. He entered largely into every circumstance of his past life, since their separation at Stoke, and ventured even to state his apprehensions, that his last pe-

netential letter could never have been received, or his beloved friend would not so rigidly have treated him. That, however, he might have been seduced by bad example, he had never, in thought, word, or deed, disobeyed or neglected his commands; nor could he accuse himself of having so far forgotten his precepts, as either to have practised deceit, or sunk into depravity. He then explained the good fortune that the extraordinary bounty of Mr. and Mrs. Valpine had poured upon him, and of the necessity he was under, of immediately setting off for Portsmouth; and inclosing the bank note he had received, as a sum no longer necessary to his wants, he concluded in the following terms. "Perhaps my dearest friend and father I may never see you more! and oh! my heart bleeds at the thought! but my prayers and blessings will be nightly yours. Your precepts, my venerable instructor, shall be my

future monitors and guides through the wayward fortune I may be destined to pursue."

Having sealed and deposited with his own hands, this letter in the post-office, he returned to the lieutenant's to partake of an early dinner with him and his amiable wife. Fitzallen approved of what he had written to Mr. Denham. "And I think it highly probable, my dear boy," said he, "that you may still be detained in England:—for I cannot but believe that this good man has been deceived, and will never suffer you to take so long and hazardous a voyage, eligible as your present prospects, with prudence, certainly are." Here the lieutenant proceeded to give our hero such cautions and instructions as he thought requisite for a young man just launching, as it were, into a new life. And, indeed, few were better qualified for the task, for Fitzallen had seen and studied mankind, and was well acquainted with the *arcana* of human policy: virtue

in short, was as quickly acknowledged by him, as vice detected.

When the time came for the worthy officer to depart, he tenderly embraced his wife and his children, and, together with Reybridge, walked slowly to the inn. The horses of the coach were putting to, when they arrived, which the lieutenant perceiving, took our hero aside, and again ardently embracing him—"Farwell! my life's preserver!" said he, the tears gushing from his eyes; "amiable, generous Reybridge! I know not what it is that assures me I shall one day or another—but, let it pass. God knows the wishes of all hearts!—sometimes he graciously designs to accomplish them! I will write to you, my friend, rely upon it; and give you the earliest information of my success. Have a wary eye on those who may hereafter profess themselves your friends, for there is some *mystery* in the conduct of the Valpines, concerning you; and I fear, notwithstanding appearances, they are not

true."—" Good Heaven, my dear friend," exclaimed our hero, "what is it you would infer? that Valpine in his last actions, has not been sincere! From indigence, from the walls of a prison has he raised me to a creditable independence, and established me in a line of life that with prudence, application, and integrity, aided by the blessing of Heaven, must lead on to fortune. This did he do too, at a time when my first and only friend had forsaken me, and I found myself an outcast on the face of the earth, without parent or relative! Is it within the bounds of possibility, that, under such circumstances, there can lurk treachery?" Here the coachman interrupted them by summoning the lieutenant to take his place in the coach, which was just going off. Fitzallen, therefore, had only time to embrace our hero for the last time. "Notwithstanding what you have said, my dear lad," replied he, "be upon your guard; still keep in mind the precepts of

your virtuous tutor, and remember Fitz-allen." Thus saying, he sprung into the coach, and was presently on his way to Shrewsbury.

Ralph returned to Cornhill, wholly at a loss to account for his friend the lieutenant's suspicions, yet convinced that they were founded upon a long and well-tried observation of the actions of mankind. Shocked at the bare supposition of accepting favours that might, for aught he knew, ultimately prove the wages of villainy, he endeavoured to get rid of his disagreeable reflections, by thinking of his voyage and its happy consequence; in which employment he was found by Mr. Horton. This worthy man had been dining, he said, with some gentlemen of the navy, from whom he had learned that the convoy was at last appointed: to consist of the Vengeance of 50 guns, and the Phœbe sloop of war. "So that you have no time to lose, Mr. Reybridge," continued he, "and I think you will do

right to set off by to-morrow evening at furthest. I have taken care about your things, and procured a bill upon Messrs. R—— and Co. Madras, at fifteen days sight, for star pagodas two thousand, which will be your own fault if you do not increase to twenty, in the course of a few years; for the common interest there is eight per cent."—"Good God!" replied Ralph, "this is very sudden, indeed! I thought I should have had a week at least given me to prepare."—"Pho, pho," answered Horton, "you are young in these matters, Mr. Reybridge; and have no conception how soon our slop-shops at this end of the town are able to fit out a single passenger like you. You may rely upon it, the things you ordered yesterday are not only ready for you, but put on board the Phœnix by this time, so you will have nothing to do but to get your credentials, and an order to be received on board, which Mr. Crokum has bound himself to have ready to-morrow morn-

ing." Our hero could not but feel thankful for the friendliness with which Horton appeared to have acted, and thanked him accordingly. He was, however, rather incredulous with regard to the suddenness and dispatch of the slop-sellers, but his anxiety on this head was soon over, for calling at their house of business in —— street, soon after, he was given to understand, with no less pleasure than surprize, that Mr. Reybridge's trunks, &c. &c. had actually been dispatched that morning early, according to the directions of Mr. Horton. Much relieved by this intelligence, he made the best of his way to the inn, from which he had been told the Portsmouth coach set out every evening, and securing himself a place, returned to his friend whom he very warmly thanked for the trouble he had put himself to on his account. "No thanks, Sir, no thanks, I beg;" replied Horton. "I am used to these things, and would have got your business done

for you, had it been necessary, in a quarter of the time: for these fellows, you must know, would as soon eat their fingers as disoblige me."

The following morning Ralph and his friend proceeded to the palace in Leadenhall-street, where a confusion of tongues, (to which that of the building of Babel would have seemed soft music) almost stunned our hero; nor, did the motley crowd which blocked up the avenues to every office, fill him with less astonishment. At length, by dint of pushing and perseverance, the gentlemen got access to the august presence of the great Crokum, who, after abundance of cross questioning and cross examination, for which poor Reybridge had come very little prepared, and would have made but a bad hand in replying to, but for the assistance of Horton, presented him with the requisite credentials, &c. taking care, however, with the most conscientious exactness, to administer the oaths, and pocket the fees,

which were so exorbitant, that a by-stander at all conversant in affairs of this nature, would have set our hero down, young as he was, as a senior merchant in the service, without further question. But the fact was, that the worthy Mr. Crokum had been duly apprized of its being poor Ralph's first appearance in Leadenhall-street, and that he knew no more of office perquisites than the man in the moon.

The parting of Reybridge and Fitzallen's family was affecting in the extreme. Mrs. Fitzallen embraced him as she would have embraced a dear and much loved son, and the children clung round him, their little eyes overflowing with tears of gratitude and affection.

At length our hero tore himself away from a scene which was become insupportably painful, and hurried to the coffee-house where Mr. Horton had appointed to meet him previously to his departure. The worthy agent was sitting

in a box, with some letters and other papers before him. On seeing Ralph, he ordered tea, and then opened his discourse in the following terms: "Mr. Reybridge, I have, with some difficulty I confess, procured for you some letters of recommendation, among which is one to Mr. Macglib, who is in council, and will be able to do a great deal for you. Here they are," putting the letters into our hero's hands, "and indeed I doubt not but they will be of essential assistance to you in the line you are in. At all events, they will give you a respectable introduction into society, and you will be able to work your own way with the greater advantage." Ralph was utterly confounded at a piece of good fortune so very unexpected; and his conscience smote him for having paid so little respect and attention to a man who had not only proved himself an active friend, but, to all appearances, must be a person of no inconsiderable influence with the higher powers,

since he could procure recommendations to counsellors. He was beginning, therefore, at once to testify shame for his past conduct, and to express his grateful acknowledgments for the present favours, when Horton interrupted him. "Pho, pho," said he, "there is no mighty favour in the business, these things are done every day, Mr. Reybridge; however, I wish you heartily, success. Here," contined he, "is the bill on R—— and Co. but I would advise you to lock it up in your trunk for fear of accidents." Then, looking at his watch, "bless me! it is time you should be at the inn where your coach sets out, but you have not far to go. I am sorry a particular engagement prevents my accompanying you, but I wish you every happiness, I do upon my soul!" Thus saying, and shaking our hero cordially by the hand, he hurried off, leaving Ralph astonished, to observe in the same man, such a strange mixture of conceit, insensibility, and benevolence.

Having now carefully deposited his valuable paper treasure in his pocket-book, not without thinking of his friend the lieutenant's mishap, he proceeded with all expedition to the inn. The horses were putting to, but he had still time to lodge his pleasing burden in his trunk; he then stepped into the place in the coach that had been reserved for him, and gave himself up to all the flattering illusions of a warm imagination.

END OF VOL. I.

RAJA SERFOJI'S SARASWATI MAHAL LIBRARY

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ERRATA.

Owing to the Author's distance from the press, the following errors of the printer escaped correction in considerable part of this Edition.

Vol. I. p. 35. l. 13, *after* about *dele* full point
— 54. l. 7, *for* clasp *read* clap
— 59. l. 12, *for* resolution *read* revolution
— 62. l. 1, *for* expressed *read* suppressed
— 92. l. 4, *for* which *read* what
— ib. l. 2, *del.* full point *after* you
— 135. l. 14, *after* know *read* not
— 135. l. 20, *for* theatrical *read* theological

Vol. II. — 61. l. 18, *for* bow *read* bows
— 76. l. 19, *for* Ray *read* hey!

Vol. III. — 140. l. 14, *after* throat *dele* for

Vol. IV. — 51. l. 17, *for* gibs *read* jibs
— 55. l. 9, *for* taught *read* tought
— 60. l. 10, *for* re-entering *read* entering
— 62. l. 1, *for* lay *read* lag.

MAHARAJA SERFOJI'S SARASWATI MAHAL